MADAME DE POMPADOUR

A Study in Temperament

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM
THE FRENCH
BY

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TO THE READER

DEAR READER,—I am not an historian, bringing you unpublished documents on the Marquise de Pompadour. I am a portraitist fondly interested in my model, who, following illustrious predecessors, has tried to depict for you, after a woman's manner, the figure of a woman. In this pastel sketch what is to live again for you is the Parisian woman of the middle-class, the mistress and friend of the King—beheld, not in her political capacity, but in her privacy as woman loving and beloved; a Pompadour in something like undress, an artist-nature in a pretty fragile body—she who died as she had lived, in a Court gown, with a sad smile upon her lips.

M. T.

The Publishers desire to thank
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ILLUSTRATIONS

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MADAME DE POMPADOUR . . *Frontispiece*
From a plumbago drawing by J. B. Greuze.

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Painted by La Jour.

CHAPTER I

ON the days when Louis XV hunted the deer in the Forest of Sénart, the neighbouring lords of the manor—and not only they, but the more unpretending middle-class members of local society—were accorded permission to follow the chase. They would arrive, some in carriages, others on horseback, an excited motley throng which, from the respectful distance enjoined by etiquette, admired the dazzling spectacle.

At the appointed spot, on a sumptuous background of beeches and oaks, arrayed in all the burning hues of their autumnal tapestry, the Master of the Hounds was to be seen, surrounded by his whippers-in and huntsmen. Grooms were in charge of the horses, and these, awaiting their riders, mingled their whinnying with the barking of the great white and red

hounds of the royal Kennels. In Oudry's pictures we may see them, supple and ferocious, leaping on the vanquished boar. The royal coaches, filled with fine ladies and gentlemen, would come rolling along a woodland drive, where the soft blue haze was riddled by the arrows of the sun. The King and his guests, in the blue hunting-dress, knives at their belts, three-cornered hats set jauntily upon their powdered heads, would mount their steeds. The royal coaches would withdraw; and Louis XV, very erect in the saddle, very graceful and dignified, would pass before the other carriages and riders, fondly saluted by ladies who, one and all, looked on the King of France with the eyes of Mme. de Châteauroux. These legal and financial ladies, who would never be allowed to mingle with the titled huntresses, hung upon the King's least glance, and simultaneously were watching with jealous curiosity the favourite whom all detested. But the King's handsome face, scarce marked as yet by the tedium of power and the fatigues of pleasure, was expressive of no sort of feeling.

It was an unmoved mask, with noble features, a scornful mouth, and large, black, lustreless eyes.

Among the light carriages which were about to hunt on wheels in the royal chase, it was noticeable that a good place was always found by a pretty little sky-blue phaeton. In this was seated a young woman, dressed in rose-colour, herself holding the reins, like a Venus of the opera in her nautilus boat. When the King passed before this lady in rose-colour, she would sustain without any affected confusion the occasionally arrested glance of the sovereign; and when, at the strident summons of the horns, riders and hounds fled onward like a whirlwind, the little sky-blue phaeton would mingle with the other carriages and "gondolas." Often at the turning of a path it would reappear alone, detached from the thick of the crowd, just at the moment when the King might be likely to notice it; and when the fanfares were echoing one another from sky to sky, when the royal huntsman, after the despatch of the deer, was returning to Choisy, the fragile phaeton would

sometimes graze the heavy coach where, taciturn and pensive, the King was listening to the dialogue of Mme. de Châteauroux and Mme. de Chevreuse.

Now on one of these hunting evenings it chanced that Mme. de Chevreuse spoke of the lady in the blue phaeton, that Oread disguised as a Parisian woman of fashion. Louis XV, always inquisitive about his subjects' private lives and remarkably well posted in them by his police, happened to know this charming person's name. He was aware that she was the wife of a Treasurer of the Mint, one M. Le Normant, and that she lived at Etiolles, a country-house belonging to her uncle by marriage, the *fermier-général* Tournehem.

Very ill-born and very well-educated, gifted with all the graces and all the talents, she lived on the margin of real society, in a circle composed of revenue-officials, newly enriched merchants, writers, artists, philosophers, and occasional errant grandees. She was called "the beauty of Paris," and her intimates had a pet name for her—"Reinette." Although she

was quite one-and-twenty, she had never yet had a lover, and it was said that she was reserving herself for the King of France.

The King of France loved, as much as he was capable of loving, the Duchesse de Châteauroux, youngest of the three Nesle sisters, she who had caused him to forget her elders, Mme. de Mailly and Mme. de Vintimille. And even if he had not loved his haughty favourite, he would scarcely have condescended so far as to desire such a little bourgeoise as Mme. Le Normant d'Etiolles, born Jeanne Antoinette Poisson. Nevertheless, it is not disagreeable to a voluptuary, even though he be a king, to have caught the fancy of a very pretty woman. Louis XV had too often glanced at the blue phaeton for Mme. de Châteauroux to be able to endure without some protest the impertinent apology made by Mme. de Chevreuse for alluding to "that little d'Etiolles woman, who was looking even prettier than usual." Furtively, in the twilight of the carriage, the irritated duchess set her foot upon that of the other duchess, and crushed it so savagely that

Mme. de Chevreuse cried out and fainted. Her swoon cut short a dangerous conversation, and there was no further question, that evening, of the lady in the blue phaeton.

CHAPTER II

IT was no mere accident which thus, on every hunting-day, brought Mme. Le Normant d'Etiolles prominently before the eyes of the King. These encounters had all the appearance of a purpose long directed to a single aim, and were, in fact, the outcome of a considered scheme. The friends of Mme. d'Etiolles, her uncle Tournehem, her mother —the very beautiful and very shady Mme. Poisson—were fond of saying that Jeanne Antoinette was "a dainty for a King." She herself, when admirers became pressing, was wont to repulse them with a phrase which had become her recognised formula:

"I shall not deceive my husband with anyone, unless perhaps the King."

Which passed for a joke and much amused the happy husband, for he was young, inexperienced, and blind as Love himself.

In marrying Jeanne Antoinette, M. Le Normant had obeyed his heart, and also the wishes of M. de Tournehem, who was an intimate friend of the Poissons. The girl's family was not of those with which an honourable man is anxious to ally himself. The father, a peasant's son, ignoble in appearance and manners, and quite devoid of morals or scruples, had made his fortune in the service of the Brothers Pâris-Duverney, food contractors to the Army. Entrusted with the provisioning of Paris during the scarcity of 1725, he speculated so successfully that he was quite unable to render any accounts to the Surveyor-General, Fagon, and was sentenced to be hanged for contumacy. He fled to Germany, lay low, intrigued, managed to get his case reconsidered, and was reappointed after having paid the Treasury four hundred thousand *livres*. Later, he was to obtain honourable mention, and even a title, by means of malpractices described as "services."

Such was the father. Was the mother any better? Daughter of "a butcher to the Invalides," and in her youth as handsome as her

daughter was pretty, she had made useful friends: Mme. de Tencin, impoverished and aging, but unchangeably addicted to intrigue; the Prince de Grinsberg, Pâris-Montmartel, and above all M. de Tournehem, who consoled her during her husband's absence, and personally directed the education of her children. The two little Poissons were adorable. Abel was "as handsome as the day"; Jeanne Antoinette, the god-daughter of Mme. de Tencin, enchanting both in face and disposition. M. de Tournehem loved them so well that jealous persons talked, but it seems certain that the jealous persons wasted their calumnious breath, for the contemptible M. Poisson was in very truth the natural and legal author of these two little masterpieces.

Mme. Poisson desired for her daughter, a more brilliant husband than her own, and by dint of dreaming of the future arrived at wanting to divine it. So she went, with her little girl, to consult Mme. Lebon, the fashionable card-reader. The soothsayer knew her Paris, and could read the secret souls of clients. She

laid out the cards and declared that Mlle. Poisson would be "not Queen, but *almost* Queen." Mme. Poisson, who was—with beauty into the bargain—a sort of Madame Cardinal,[1] pressed her daughter to her heart and called her her dear little Reinette. Then she went home, dazzled by a future which she beheld all blue and powdered with the golden lilies of a royal mantle.

When a young lady is brought up for the royal pleasure she is instructed in quite other things than knitting and her catechism, and it is not in a convent that she goes to school.

Reinette, indeed, *had* spent a year with the Ursulines of Poissy, where two of her aunts were nuns. This was in 1730, during M. Poisson's voluntary exile. The good sisters were very fond of the child, who was refined both in looks and character, very sensitive, very intelligent, and (said the Mother-Superior in a letter to Mme. Poisson) "so attractive as to charm everyone who beheld her." Had she

[1] "*Une sorte de Mme. Cardinal*": this probably refers to Halévy's *La Famille Cardinal.* [Translator's Note.]

not been so pretty, her mother might have left her at the convent, and she would there have completed her education, developing her excellent qualities of heart under a steady religious direction. She would very probably have become a virtuous woman, whose obscure career we should never have heard of, and she would possibly have been a happier one. But pretty she was, and she had an ambitious mother. Reinette was removed from the convent at nine years old; and it was then that her real education began, an education very different from that conceived by Fénélon for eighteenth-century maidens, as also from that which Rousseau was one day to prescribe for Émile's ideal fiancée, the imaginary Sophie.

It was the education of a superior courtesan, designed to produce an Aspasia who should be modern and a Frenchwoman—the sort of education which aims at enhancing all the seductiveness of woman. The sciences, literature, music, are turned to uses both of ornament and strategy. Mme. Poisson knew the value of beauty, but she knew too that beauty, if it

draws the man, does not suffice to hold him; that there are hours of melancholy or fatigue in which the fairest face is powerless, if not irradiated by an inward light; in a word, that man demands variety and that that woman will keep him who can satisfy this unconscious claim, native to the most faithful of his sex. And so the astute Mme. Poisson spared no pains to make her daughter an epitome of all the feminine graces and all the feminine accomplishments. Jeanne Antoinette learnt singing and the harpsichord with Jélyotte, dancing with Guibaudet, elocution with Crébillon and Lanoue. She could sketch, and engrave upon gems; and this exercise, in which she never progressed from good class-work to the display of a genuine talent, did at any rate develop very greatly her sense of colour and line. In all this there was nothing of pedantry, but a perfect sense of proportion, and that exquisite tact which is the chastity of the mind. Mlle. Poisson was in no degree an Armande, still less a Henriette. She would never have kissed Vadius for love of Greek; but she did like intellectual

men, and her desires extended far beyond the horizon of the household. Her girlish dreams took higher flight than that.

As long as she could remember, Jeanne Antoinette had found the image of the King among her childish musings. The card-reader's strange prediction, together with certain reflections made by Mme. Poisson and M. de Tournehem, had intoxicated a little head wherein the irrational dreams of adolescence were secretly frothing. Reinette was in love with the handsome King—so handsome, and (they said) so bored with his wife. She knew by hearsay all the gossip of the Court; knew of the favour, followed by the disgrace, of Mme. de Mailly, and of the insolent triumph of Mme. de Vintimille. These adulterous and incestuous love-affairs in no way scandalised Mme. Poisson's friends, and Jeanne Antoinette saw nothing wrong in them. The King was above ordinary rules, and along with him the women whom he deigned to distinguish. There is no sort of doubt that Reinette longed ardently to be one of those women; for, if she had been

taught the sciences, letters, the arts—and that most arduous of all, the art of pleasing—her instruction in morality had been completely overlooked. In that first half of the eighteenth century Rousseau had not yet given tongue; and if they piqued themselves already on their "sensibility," they did not yet assume the panoply of virtue on every possible occasion.

Those Parisian drawing-rooms where the hostess had no desire, and perhaps no right, to be very fastidious about the quality of her guests, were open to Mme. Poisson because she was agreeable, and to Mlle. Poisson because she was her mother's daughter. Mme. de Tencin had taken them up, and it was at her house that Reinette made acquaintance with the intellectuals of the period: Marivaux, Montesquieu, Duclos, Fontenelle. The Poissons had not succeeded in forcing Mme. Geoffrin's door, nor that of her daughter, Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault, whom they were aching to know. On the other hand, they were received by Mme. d'Angervilliers. They were there one evening at a large gathering, when someone asked

Jeanne Antoinette to sing the great aria from Lulli's *Armide*. She sang it in a voice so fresh and so pathetic that a lady—no longer very young nor very beautiful—could not restrain her tears, and flung herself into the singer's arms. Jeanne Antoinette, astonished and flattered, inquired who this might be. They told her that it was Mme. de Mailly, the King's mistress.

Reinette, on hearing this, must have reflected that the King had not very good taste. She must have sighed, remembering the soothsayer's prediction; and some months later—on March 9, 1741—she married M. Le Normant d'Etiolles, who was neither handsome nor graceful, but rich, amorous, and a disbeliever in cartomancy.

For the daughter of François Poisson it was a brilliant match. One stage was passed. Now she could hope to penetrate a circle which would never have admitted Mlle. Poisson with her mother at her side; but in which, with her husband, she had a place. But the mother, personally ambitious as well, was not inclined to efface herself. She was imprudent enough

to accompany Mme. d'Etiolles to Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault's. The witty Marquise, whom her friends called "the Marquise Carillon" because of her brilliant and restless gaiety, has given in her *Souvenirs* an amusing account of this undesired visit:

When M. de Tournehem had married his nephew, d'Etiolles, to the little Poisson girl, he took a house within four doors of my father's and the Poisson woman was very anxious to make friends with my mother, whose salon was beginning to be renowned. She made a pretext of her daughter, for whom it was so desirable to frequent good houses; and to my great surprise and annoyance I one day beheld the pair arriving both at my mother's and my own. The mother was so talked about that it was impossible to cultivate her acquaintance, but one wanted to be polite to the daughter. I was a good deal perplexed as to how I should keep them apart without being actually rude; but I managed in the end to call only on Mme. d'Etiolles, who had asked my mother's permission to come often to her house so as "to hear some good talk," for her uncle's circle was, she said, composed of "quite worthy people, but their tone was very inferior."

The permission was accorded, and Mme. d'Etiolles saw opening before her "the kingdom

of the Rue Saint-Honoré," the artistic and philosophic salon which was ruled by that benevolent grim fairy, Mme. Geoffrin, illustrious in Paris and all Europe. "Pretty, graceful, extremely kind-hearted, an exquisite singer, and gifted with every attractive talent, she greatly charmed the old philosophers of the Wednesday gatherings.

So here was a further stage, and one which brought the young wife within measurable distance of the great aristocratic houses and their exalted circles. Mme. Le Normant had a house in Paris, a country-house at Etiolles, and forty thousand *livres* a year; it was her turn now to receive Montesquieu, Fontenelle, President Hénault, old and faithful friend of Marie Leczinska, the Abbé Bernis and Voltaire, who rivalled one another in composing little verses about her; then there was President du Rocher, who was later to write, recalling her: "Beautiful, pale, gentle, my Pamela! I gave her that name at Etiolles, where I spent a part of the summers of 1741 and 1742, and where we read to her the English novel *Pamela*, at the house of

M. Bertin de Blagny, my relative. . . ." And to put the finishing touch to this early taste of triumph, there was her talent for acting. She shone at Chantemerle, Mme. de Villemer's country-house, where she performed with the Dukes of Nivernois and Duras, before the Duc de Richelieu; and at M. de Tournehem's, Etiolles itself, where the *fermier-général* had built "a little theatre, as handsome as the Opera House, with changes of scene and machinery." Soon she began at last to visit titled people, the real Court circle—Mme. de Sassenage, wife of a gentleman of the Dauphin's Household, and Mme. de Saissac, aunt of the Duc de Luynes. And these were all so many rungs upon the dizzying ladder which ended . . . in Cloudland, in the inaccessible Olympus of Versailles.

For Mme. Le Normant d'Etiolles had not renounced the dream of Mlle. Poisson, nor was the husband uneasy, nor did their friends perceive in Reinette's alleged love for the King anything more than a harmless piece of coquetry. Mme. Poisson and M. de Tourne-

hem—these alone knew what there was of reality in the accepted badinage; but *they* were the authors and accomplices of her craze, they shared her secret views, and were by no means displeased that the blue phaeton, dashing through the Forest of Sénart, should offer "the lady in rose-colour" to the royal vision.

At that moment the youthful beauty of Mme. d'Etiolles was in its full perfection. Life had not yet laid a finger on the fragile bloom of a complexion where even the shadows were pearly, the complexion of a pure blonde, a *déjeuner de soleil*[1] which betrayed a lymphatic and passive temperament, but in its early spring-time made one think of all the fairest, frailest marvels—the opalescence of a shell, the rosy heart of the woodbine. The features were regular and delicate. The lips, a little too pale, but bitten into colour by the pretty teeth, could smile enchantingly; the brow was made to have the hair thus drawn straight back, then lifted in soft waves obedient to the head's pure

[1] *Dejeuner de soleil* is said of a material which will quickly fade; hence, by extension, of anything ephemeral. [Translator's Note.]

line—that chestnut hair on which the powder spread its silver, but was powerless to hide the gold. The eyebrows were two fair, unbroken arches; and in the eyes, whose hue was ever changing—were they blue or green or brown? —the light of the intelligence gleamed radiant. Lissom was the form, and ravishing were the arms and hands; the rounded neck sufficed to "fill a manly hand"—and all this charming personality in its spreading skirts of puffed brocade, its ribboned bodices afroth with lace, its dainty slippers, with its little knot of flowers on shoulder or on bosom, seemed (said a contemporary) to "draw the line between the last degree of elegance and the first of aristocracy."

In August, 1744, she was at Etiolles, where her little daughter, Alexandrine, had just been born. The influence of Mme. Poisson, though it may have succeeded in perverting Reinette's sweet simple nature, had not entirely destroyed its deeper qualities. She, who was through all her life to be the tenderest of daughters and of sisters, was also a most tender mother; and the birth of Alexandrine was some consolation for

the loss of her first-born son. She savoured this bliss, which in no wise disturbed her perceptions nor upset her projects, for the maternal instinct knows nothing of morality; she could await, not too impatiently, the hunting-season which was to renew those drives in the blue phaeton. She was missing nothing by staying at home, since the King would not as yet be coming to the Forest of Sénart. . . . For Louis XV was with his armies; and, following the illustrious example of his great-grandfather, had taken his favourite with him.

Suddenly comes news—comes like a clap of thunder. The King has fallen ill at Metz, and the physicians despair of his life. The "pious party" is in full activity around the dying man; and, humbled before the King of Terrors who casts down the kingdoms of the earth and subjugates the most exalted princes to the merest human wretchedness, Louis XV is solely possessed by the thought of Eternity. He loses ground in a relapse, his fever increases, nearer yawns the abyss; and he summons Father Pérusseau, a Jesuit, his confessor. The sen-

tence of the Church is rigorous. Absolution and the viaticum shall not be given to the invalid unless he dismisses his concubine and recalls his spouse. Soon a berline is smuggling off Mme. de Châteauroux and her sister Mme. de Lauraguais, who at Barèges are hooted by the populace, and run great risks of being murdered at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre. The blind anger of the people, which as yet will spare the King, contents itself with this outburst against the mistresses. And while all France is knelt in prayer for the *Bien-Aimé*, the Court carriages are driving through Champagne with the weeping Queen and her children. France is overjoyed by the public repentance of the King, by the pardon he repeatedly begs of the Queen —who, with her heart all quivering for love, accords it; and still wilder is the joy, the joy unhoped for, when France learns of the semi-miraculous recovery of Louis XV.

Mme. d'Etiolles sustained a shock from these events. She was scarcely convalescent when she heard of the King's danger, and she had a "bad turn" of which she nearly died. The

disappearance of the King—what would that signify but the ending of the dream, the brutal contradiction of destiny to the prophetic science of Mme. Lebon? . . . But the King is saved, and Reinette lives again.

On November 13, 1744, Louis, called "the Well-Beloved," returned to Paris, and his re-entry was celebrated by magnificent festivities: a solemn *Te Deum* at Notre-Dame, concerts, fireworks, illuminations, a banquet at the Hôtel de Ville. It was noticed that the King looked particularly well, and did justice to the aldermen's good things. Dinner over, the doors were thrown open and the populace came in and plundered the fruit dishes, "as the custom was." At Versailles there were renewed festivities. Good folk outside Court circles began to think that better days were really at hand for the kingdom and its subjects. They believed in happiness for Marie Leczinska, who was infinitely loved and respected. But the Queen's friends spoke sadly of her distress and the King's inexcusable frigidity. The invalid of Metz, too soon restored to health, could not

forgive the Queen the forgiveness he had had from her. The bugbear of Death warded off, he returned to the old sin quite shamelessly. On November 27th Mme. de Châteauroux wrote to the Duchesse de Boufflers: "The King has just announced to me by M. de Maurepas that he was much annoyed by what happened at Metz and by the indecency with which I had been treated; he begged me to forget it, and, as a sign of my oblivion, he hoped that we would consent to resume our apartments at Versailles; he would never fail to give me proofs of his protection and friendship, and all our expenses should be made good to us."

"One cannot," wrote the Duc de Luynes in his Journal, "describe the effect upon the people of the recall of Mme. de Châteauroux, and the restitution of the two ladies to their appointments, after what happened at Metz. Versailles, where as a rule there is little comment, was not silent on this matter. However, as such expressions of opinion can only displease, and in any event could make no difference, the wiser held their tongues." But those who were

not of the Court had a great deal to say about the incident. Foreign visitors were indignant; and the fishwives who had so fervently prayed for the King's recovery, expressing in their blunt, unvarnished style the sentiments of the Parisians, declared that "now he had taken back his harlot, he would not find a *Pater* on the pavements of all Paris."

CHAPTER III

THE letter of recall was dated November 25th. Mme. de Châteauroux had received it in bed, where she was kept by a touch of fever. On December 1st the news of her was bad, and the King ("very serious," says M. de Luynes) scarcely spoke a word to anyone. On the 4th the Duchess was unconscious. She had confessed and been reconciled to her sister, Mme. de Flavacourt. The King did not go out all day, and looked "altered and strangely depressed." Hope was renewed on the 5th, "and the change for the better is clearly to be read on the King's face." On the 8th Mme. de Châteauroux was dead, and on the morning of the 10th she was buried at a very early hour, because of the popular indignation.

The King, who had taken refuge at La Muette with four or five of his intimates, made no

concealment of his grief. He shed tears for "the only mistress he had ever loved," as he confessed to Mme. de Séran; but for the courtiers his bereavement was merely an occasion for intrigue. Kings who have little feeling for others will not be themselves much felt for. Louis XV, deprived of love, and lacking any genuine friends, relapsed into a vacuous ennui.

An orphan from childhood, unacquainted with any tenderness, he had always been bored. In vain had Nature given him an upright mind, sane judgment, a clear memory, a heart potentially good—he was like a fine garden so ill-cultivated that the soil turns fallow, and the flowers scantily survive among the brambles. He would perhaps have been studious if anyone had troubled to make him study; he showed some curiosity about the sciences, especially geography, but he was entirely ignorant of the arts and of letters, and "his personal ideas were limited to his private life." Singularly clever with his hands, as was his grandson, Louis XVI, it amused him to cook, to do turnery, to fashion snuff-boxes. He made one of these for the

New Year gifts of 1739, and the pattern was copied by professional craftsmen. It was of fir-wood, unpeeled and hollowed out. Considerate in private life and with his servants, indifferent to great affairs, through indolence and contempt for humanity, exacting with those whom he loved, pitiless when he loved them no longer, egotism was his dominating trait, despite the sudden attacks of nervous sensibility which would sometimes end in tears. For this son of the Duc de Bourgogne there should have been another Fénélon: he had had only the Cardinal de Fleury. That old prelate, who had no notion of forming a Télémaque, had observed in his royal charge a fundamental timidity and distrust which he astutely fostered so as the better to govern him. He taught the young King the most profound distrust for all humanity, and a systematic scepticism with regard to virtue and probity. The third person in the royal household, and jealous of the Queen's credit, he contributed powerfully towards dispersing the careless affection which was all her husband ever felt for her; later he winked at

adultery. His death liberated Louis XV from a tutelage which had become distasteful to him; but the mischief was done. Fleury's method of education had irreparably damaged a nature which in other hands would not have been a bad one; but which, when thus delivered over as a prey to arrogance, indolence, and ignorance, was to find within itself no shield against the passions of youth and the vices of a riper age.

At seventeen he had at first been scared by the thought of marriage; then, amused by its novelty, he fancied himself in love with the Queen, who adored him. Plain but charming, the superior in heart and character of her youthful husband, she deserved to be happy and could have given happiness; but the couple were ill-assorted. The King cared for nothing but hunting, gaming, little supper-parties—he drank deeply on these occasions. He liked to frequent the public balls with his favourite friends, "disguised as Spaniards or as Frenchmen of the time of Henri IV." The Queen loved reading, the conversation of quiet people,

a simple, tranquil, leisurely, retired existence. In her apartments the King was always out of temper; his face one jaundiced mask of boredom, he would utter no word, and find his only diversion in killing flies upon the window-panes. Nevertheless, the royal children, the *enfants de France*, arrived regularly—one every year—though neither their birth nor their death could joyfully or sadly bring their parents' hearts any nearer together. Then the Queen's health began to suffer. The King made this the pretext for emancipating himself from a joyless duty; and it was then that at a supper-party given by the Comtesse de Toulouse, he drank to the Unknown—to her who was about to arrive. . . .

She arrived; and she was Mme. de Mailly, scarcely pretty, "as tall as a house," but disinterested and capable of truly loving the man in the King; then she was Mme. de Vintimille, then Mme. de Châteauroux. . . .

CHAPTER IV

AND now the King is all alone; he may be anyone's. In the heavy ennui which succeeds the first days of despair, the women are alert for the inevitable hour when he will seek, with one of them, the sole intoxication which can wean him from his grief. Richelieu[1] manœuvres cunningly to prevail on Mme. de Flavacourt; she indignantly refuses; but Mme. de Brionne, Mme. de la Popelinière, Mme. de Rochechouart, offer themselves brazenly. . . . Louis XV, the most distrustful and dissimulative of men, feared these ambitious ladies, whose false tenderness was but a means to success. He knew that the legend of the great favourites, of a Montespan, mother of legitimate children and "vice-reine" for fourteen years, haunted these

[1] This Duc de Richelieu was a grand-nephew of the great Cardinal. [Translator's Note.]

proud aristocrats, and that titled mistresses dispose of their honour in exchange for honours. He was not desirous to entangle himself with a woman who would be insatiate in her demands for places, benefices, pensions for herself and her family. Possibly within his heart—that abyss of egotism and contradictions—there lingered some regret for the disinterested love which had been shown him by Mme. de Mailly, and which he had rewarded with ingratitude; possibly, too, there was the wish to be man rather than king for an obscure favourite who, having nothing to hope for, would not be importunate. Taken from nowhere, she would return to nowhere on a word from the master; and, if she should chance to fall in love with him, her passion, all humility and adoration, would lend a piquancy to pleasure without presuming to make claims. Louis XV was doubtless dreaming vaguely of those slaves of the harem, those favourite sultanas who are nothing more than beautiful petted cats. His curiosity was turning towards the middle-class Parisian beauty, whose reign was beginning in French society.

Through the police reports and the indiscretions of the postal service, he was acquainted with his subjects' private lives, their love-affairs and their adventures. He talked about them at night to his valet Binet. And in that hour of ease, the *coucher*, when the King permitted himself strange confidences, Binet related all he knew of Paris and the Parisian women; he mentioned —without proposing her, as some have said— casually mentioned his cousin, Mme. d'Etiolles, who desired for her husband an appointment as *fermier-général*. . . . Mme. d'Etiolles, "the lady in rose-colour" of the Forest of Sénart! Before the King's pensive eyes there passed a graceful figure, driving in her blue phaeton under the golden-bronze trees. That "little d'Etiolles woman" who had vexed poor Châteauroux, that protégée of the intriguing Tencin, that young beauty so ill-born but so well-educated, who was enchanting the financial drawing-rooms . . . she had no lovers, as yet. Virtuous, then? That would be too much to say. She was known to have declared that she was reserving herself, would be no

one's but her husband's—unless the King's, whom she loved without hope of return. The idea amused the King. A "little d'Etiolles woman"—negligible almost! Might one not, should she present herself as a solicitant, pluck the fair flower and honour it with a short-lived caprice?

Soon, well-informed persons were whispering. Who was the mysterious lady introduced by Binet to the "inner apartments" at Versailles? Was it the same as she to whom the Duc de Luynes alludes, recording a masked ball given by Mesdames? "People declare that the King, some days ago, was at a masked ball in the town of Versailles. It is even said that there were made on that occasion some suggestions of a gallant nature, and people think that it was he whom they saw yesterday dancing with the same lady of whom there then was mention. However, it is the merest suspicion, and very unlikely to be true. The King seemed yesterday to be particularly desirous of not being recognised."

These costume-balls were the compensation

claimed by fantasy for the tedium of Court life; the laying aside of rank and etiquette; the illusion for the King of being under his mask a mere private gentleman. He could go disguised where he could never have shown himself unveiled in all his sovereign majesty: to private and public balls, and even to the Opera ball, paying for his ticket like everybody else. Only a few friends would be in attendance. At these entertainments the King, scarce guarded, in no way defended, would have been an easy prey for a Damiens . . . But it never occurred to him. He, ordinarily so distrustful, trusted in the love of the people, in the old pact of fidelity which still bound France to the Bourbons.

And never had there been more unrestraint than during the festivities of 1745, when the Dauphin espoused the Infanta Maria-Rafaela. On the night of February 27th the Castle gates were thrown open to two interminable files of carriages. Louis XV's guests alighted before the Escalier de Marbre, controlled only by a few officials standing behind an oaken barrier.

There were no tickets. It sufficed for one member of a party to raise his mask and give his own name and the names of those who accompanied him. At midnight the throng overflowed the barriers and submerged the officials. Paris was in the Palace; and beneath the glitter of the chandeliers, between the gilded panels and the towering mirrors which had been wont to reflect such stately ceremonies as the ballets and the pageants of the Roi Soleil, there surged to-night the most amazing mob of all kinds and descriptions.

Examine that engraving by Cochin, which has immobilised for posterity the tumult and the crushing of that night. The artist has treated his subject in a style of graceful dignity. True, he displays a group at supper, seated on the parquet floor; but he has eliminated those vulgarians, those entirely impossible members of the lower middle classes, whose boisterousness so affronted the Princesse de Conti. Dancers masked and unmasked, Harlequins, Pierrots, Scaramouches, Persians in flowing garments, Turks in great wondrously woven

turbans, Indians, necromancers, shepherdesses, nymphs, goddesses, all the Lignon[1] and all Olympus, all the East Indies, and all China, mingle their resplendent colours, their extravagant forms, their excited gestures, languishing movements, cross-fires of seductive glances—all the gaiety that sparkles, mounts incessantly, like the champagne poured in their glasses by the royal pages. The chandeliers are crystalline clusters of light; the candelabra like flowers of fire upon the walls, ablaze with trophies and royal emblems. In the deep embrasure of the windows, the settees and estrades look like many-coloured espalier fruit-trees. The overheated air, heavy with the fumes of wax and all the countless odours of a ball-room, is alive with quiverings of strings, with dronings of wind instruments. Thousands of humming bees might seem to take flight from the harps, the flutes, the violins, in fevered swarms that bear the crowd on their vibrations. And the

[1] The Lignon is a little river in the Forez region, an affluent of the Loire. Its banks are the scene of d'Urfe's famous pastoral novel, *L'Astrée*, hence "le Lignon" has become the symbolic pastoral country of France. [Translator's Note.]

tall solemn statues, pale amid the orgy of lights and colours, contemplate the madness of this night with their passionless eyes.

A door opens. There is an eddy in the whirling mass, and then a stoppage. The powdered glittering heads are bent. Those who cannot see press on the more fortunate spectators. What is it? . . . Who makes this triumphal entry into the Land of Fantasy? The King? Yes, yes, the King beyond a doubt! The women make a rush. They are resolute to see him and be seen by him. Is it not said that he is looking for a Venus to whom to give the golden apple? Many an accommodating heart is beating under its domino. The silken flood of billowy skirts, the nervous clattering of little heels, encircles the advancing procession. Here is Queen Marie, sweet though plain, and long before her time a charming elderly woman, leaning upon the arm of her equerry; here is the little princely pair, the adolescent bride and bridegroom, heroes of the evening, the Dauphin and his Dauphine —he travestied as a gardener, she as a flower-

girl. . . . And here are the Duc and the Duchesse de Chartres. . . . But the King? He is not in the procession. . . . And the women, disappointed, slowly ebb away before the Queen's advance—*she* does not interest them at all.

But meanwhile, by another door, strange sombre forms have entered. It is as if the gardens had marched to the assault of the Palace. Eight tall trees, like well-pruned yews, quite round, with huge globular heads, are stalking solemnly among the dancers. Are they looking for their hamadryads, who have deserted the quincunxes for the ball-room? Are they gods in metamorphosis, or heroes enthralled by a wizard? In their sable greenness can be distinguished some grotesque semblance of features—slits that look like eyes and mouths. "I know you, handsome tree, I know you!" murmur the nymphs and shepherdesses. A rumour circulates—the King is hidden under this vegetable disguise. "Is not that he, the one talking with little Mme. d'Etiolles? . . ." Mme. Portail, the President's wife, famous for

her licentious daring, would dearly love to be able to say with confident assurance: "I know you!" to the Royal Yew-tree. She sticks closely to him, loses him in the throng, retrieves him, incites him, and after a brief colloquy consents to follow the immense green-headed thing which bows to her so comically. Poor Mme. d'Etiolles! Not *she* is to replace Mme. de Châteauroux.

The Yew-tree and the President's wife have secretly gained the ante-room of the King's apartments. The masked man opens the door, and pushes the agitated beauty into a little dark room which is that of the First Royal Valet-de-Chambre. They are safe, alone and untrammelled, emboldened by the darkness. The lady does not defend herself; she is only too happy to be vanquished, and among the rustlings of her leafy lover and the murmur of their kisses, she reflects upon the spiteful comments of the other women in the morning. She asks only promises in exchange for the actualities she gives. The Yew-tree promises anything she likes. Her hair a little disordered, her

dress a little crushed, a trifle exhausted and a great deal uplifted, she leaves the gloomy little chamber, and with her victor re-enters the ball-room. . . . O heavens! what is this? With a group of his friends, King Louis XV, not masked, is crossing the gallery of the Œil-de-Bœuf. The detestable Yew-tree drops her arm, bursts into loud laughter, and vanishes.

The poor lady has gained nothing by her brief dishonour; and as the Yew-trees of the Versailles ball-room are as indiscreet as the reeds of King Midas, all Paris will hear of this adventure, and with it the name of its hero, which is M. de Briges—the "handsome de Briges," equerry to the King and an intimate friend of Mme. d'Etiolles.

This lady, who has been at the ball from its earliest moment, and who did contrive to discover the King of France in the King of the Yew-trees, has retained her rose-coloured silk domino, the better to intrigue Louis XV. He has guessed it is she, by the voice, by the scent she affects. He has urged her to unmask; she has consented, but like another Galatea has

escaped in the same moment. No sooner has he caught sight beneath the fallen hood of the forest-lady's pretty face than the beauty has vanished, dropping at the King's feet a little lace-edged handkerchief. Louis XV picks it up, looks round for Mme. d'Etiolles, perceives her in the distance, and adroitly tosses to her the symbolic wisp. A murmur arises: "The handkerchief is thrown" . . . And while the King departs to change his cumbersome costume, the lady in rose-colour, quivering all over with her triumph, sends for her carriage and drives home to Paris.

What are her thoughts as through the carriage-window she watches the glittering Palace disappear into the winter night? Does she tell herself that she will one day re-enter it by the great gateway, no longer as a smuggled-in solicitant but as a mistress openly proclaimed? Does she recall her origin to measure thereby her exaltation, and her husband to repel so dull and tiresome an image? Is she disquieted, not in her frigid flesh, but in the heart which is so ignorant of love? Of remorse she knows

nothing, since now she is sure of accomplishing her destiny, since the hour now sounding, and deciding all her future, has been looked for from her childhood, and her youth has been little more than preparation for its stroke. No religious scruples trouble her; neither her mother, nor her uncle Tournehem, nor her friends the philosophers will seek to deter her from accepting her extraordinary fortune. No one will take the part of M. d'Etiolles against the King. And happy, breathing in beneath the lace of her hood the fragrance of the handkerchief crushed by that royal hand, "Reinette" exults in the emotion wakened in her by King and lover; but as her senses are refractory and her head is cool, she is not so intoxicated as to forget to be clever. She divines that the King is charmed, but not enslaved. She calculates the pledges she will give and those she will demand. . . . What would she say if she knew that on this very night Louis XV had noticed another woman, a young girl, related to the Abbé de Bernis, and given her a rendezvous—as to Mme. d'Etiolles and many others—at the

ball to be given by the City of Paris, which was to close the marriage festivities?

The King had received Paris in his Palace. Paris, in her turn, received the King in her communal mansion-house, the old Hôtel de Ville, which was turned into one vast ball-room. Outside, the mob swarmed and buzzed, excited by the illuminations, the open-air orchestras, the distributions of meat and the fountains of wine. Loungers, trailing their children with them after the Parisian custom, wandered from the Place Louis-le-Grand, ornamented with trellised galleries, to the gallery with the landscape paintings which bridged the Carrousel; from the Rue de Sèvres, decorated with vine-branches, to the triumphal arch of the Place Dauphine. The King was to be in strict incognito, and thus yield to the Dauphin the honour of the official reception. To admire the heir to the throne, the City Marshal's guests ran the gauntlet of a terrible crushing. The disorder, the invasion of the building by all sorts of people—invited and uninvited—were such that the Dauphin's twenty-four

guards were with difficulty able to extricate the Prince and make a path for him to his carriage. A contemporary Mac-Nab has left us a comical picture of this City ball, which seems to have created a tradition piously observed to our own day.

"There was," relates this Barbier, a lawyer, "a terrible crowd and some ugly rushes. One could not get either up or down the staircases. People were carried into the rooms, suffocating, fainting. There were six buffets, either underprovisioned or understaffed; the refreshments gave out three hours after midnight. There is but one voice in Paris about the dissatisfaction caused by this ball.

"After having made such a fuss over the difficulties of a tactful selection of guests, it seems that not only must there have been no limit to the number of tickets, but that these must have been given recklessly to people of all sorts and kinds—probably to all the artisans and tradesmen connected with the place, for there were quantities of disgusting messes."

The Dauphin, rescued from this bear-garden,

was driving along towards Versailles when, at Sèvres, he met with the King's carriage. Louis XV, in a black domino, was coming . . . from the public ball at Versailles, where he had gone to kill time with some intimates. It had cost him a gold-piece. The Dauphin must have given his father an horrific description of the Hôtel de Ville, for His Majesty went straight to the Opera, where he paid for his entrance and danced two quadrilles. A little later, in a common cab—like Marie Antoinette in years to come—the King and his party drove to the Hôtel de Ville. Louis XV did not there discover the Abbé de Bernis' pretty relative—her family had wisely kept her at home; but he did meet Mme. d'Etiolles. She, like the King, was in a black domino; and was much upset in every way, having been hustled repeatedly by the throng. There was not another thought of the absent girl. If the King felt any regrets for her, he quickly consoled himself with Mme. d'Etiolles. They retired to the Marshal's private room, there to recover somewhat from the hustling. After the most tender

of interviews, and doubtless some slight liberties which made the King desirous of still further favours, the enamoured pair, escorted by the Duc d'Ayen, left the Hôtel de Ville. Certain writers have maintained that Louis took his fair one straight off to Versailles; but Mme. d'Etiolles was too shrewd to yield without some show of defence. To give herself unconditionally under the glamour of the first kiss is the act of a woman either very sensual or very ingenuous; it is not the act of a Mme. d'Etiolles, who had a cool head, and knew what she wanted and whither she meant to go.

"Where am I to take you?" asked Louis XV.

"To my mother's house."

Supremely clever! The adventure assumed a different aspect. The King no longer had the feeling that the "little d'Etiolles woman" was a rose to be plucked with a careless gesture. She thus preserved an appearance of dignity; she invested herself with a propriety which rendered her desirable. . . . Very well—the King *would* take her to her mother's! And instantly the Ever-Bored was bored no longer.

He forgot Versailles and the Dauphin, then savouring the chaste delights of love legitimate. He forgot the mob at the Hôtel de Ville, and the Marshal, and the drudgery of his royal functions. In the cab, where despite the presence of the Duc d'Ayen, he clasped the youthful beauty to his side, it was amusing to play the part of a lover in a comedy. He felt young again—felt gay. The cab drove slowly on. It was stopped by officials at a parting of the ways. The King was astounded. What? Were they not to pass? . . . Then let the driver whip up his horses! The driver protested. He did not want to get into trouble with the authorities. Louis XV spoke to the Duc d'Ayen. "Give him a louis. That will induce him."

"A louis? Believe me, Your Majesty, you had better not. To-morrow the police will hear of it; they'll make inquiries; they'll find out where we went. A smaller coin will be enough."

It was enough. The horses were whipped up under the official noses, and the King of France took back his future mistress, like a well-

brought-up young lady, to her mother's house.

Then he retrieved his carriage, regained Versailles, where he arrived at half-past eight in the morning, changed his clothes, heard the obligatory Mass, and went to bed. . . . At five o'clock in the evening he was still asleep.

CHAPTER V

THEY met again, and were lovers. This must have happened during the days which immediately succeeded the entertainment at the Hôtel de Ville, but the exact date and place of the first rendezvous remain uncertain. If we are to credit Richelieu, Binet smuggled his relative into the most private of the "Little Apartments," where she supped alone with the King. Others have stated that Louis XV, incognito, visited her at the house in the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs. On March 10th the worthy Duc de Luynes, a loyal friend to the Queen, observes that "the masked balls have afforded an opportunity for further talk about the King's new love-affairs, and principally in connection with a Mme. d'Etiolles, who is young and pretty." Rumour declared that she was almost always "in that part of the country"—meaning Versailles—"and that she

was the King's definite choice." M. de Luynes, who would have been uneasy at the installation of a favourite, adds tranquilly: "If the story is true, it would signify merely an intrigue, and certainly not a mistress."

But in the first week of April, at a performance of the Comédie Française, Mme. d'Etiolles, "very well-dressed and looking very pretty," was to be seen in a little railed-in box, quite close to the King's. On April 26th the Papal Nuncio, Monseigneur Durini, wrote to Cardinal Valenti that there was a great flutter at Court "because the King, who is madly in love with Mme. d'Etiolles, frowns on all those whom he suspects of condemning his passion." Two days later, on the 28th, the Journal of the Duc de Luynes makes mention of the scandal which had just broken out and forced the King and his mistress to a sort of avowal of their relations, in anticipation of the official announcement. M. Le Normant d'Etiolles had protested, and the "intrigue" threatened to take a dramatic turn. . . . At least, so Mme. d'Etiolles said. In the uncertainty and agitation of these early

days of her liaison she tried the ground at every step, like a cautious cat. She knew that the King, though very much in love, very much attracted sensually, refused to pledge his future. He lived with his mistress by the day and for the day, quite resolute to break away when satiety should fall upon him; and already he had shown symptoms of withdrawal. A rupture? No: a sort of defensive cunning which was well within his tortuous nature. But if Louis XV could detach himself from Mme. d'Etiolles, he would re-attach himself at once in a spirit of pure contradiction from the moment anyone should dispute her with him. The "pious party," led by Boyer, Bishop of Mirepoix, was now active round the Queen and the Dauphin to ward off the foreseen danger, to intimidate Binet, whom they accused of responsibility for the scandal. It sufficed for Binet, maladroitly threatened by the Bishop, to desire to keep his place and go with his grievance to the King. The suspicious pride of Louis XV then played, more surely than his love, into the hands of Mme. d'Etiolles. Since they were attempting

to keep her from him, he would summon her the more frequently to the Little Apartments. Soon she was to be established there, merged, save for the intimates of the supper-parties, in the shadow of the master both by night and day.

It was at this moment that the adroit young person played her highest card. She, so gentle, so gay, so gracefully pliant to the King's moods, always ready to divert him by songs and amusing stories—she appeared to droop; she wept and did not seek to hide her tears, and even in the royal arms a dark thought seemed to haunt her. . . . Louis XV interrogated her. What was she afraid of? . . . At first she would not speak, then she avowed the extreme terror she felt of M. Le Normant d'Etiolles. True, he was not in Paris. An obliging friend, M. de Savalette, had invited him for Easter to his country-house at Magnanville; but before his departure he must have suspected something, and when he came back, what would he do? Jeanne Antoinette played admirably the classic game of women who excite a man's jealousy in

order to lead him farther than he wishes to go. She depicted the excellent M. d'Etiolles as a second Bluebeard who would get her back, willing or not, and doubtless kill her. No more was wanted to lash the passion of the King who admitted no rivals; and Mme. d'Etiolles obtained the promise of that "declaration" which was to make her the equal of the Mailly, the Vintimille, the Châteauroux, a sort of royal functionary of love, a "great woman-official of the Crown."

During these discussions the peaceable M. d'Etiolles was taking a holiday at Magnanville and looking forward to a speedy return to his home, where he would find his dear Jeanne Antoinette and his little Alexandrine. Just as he was leaving, his uncle Tournehem arrived. This gentleman's face must have presented a singular mixture of pride, compassion, worry, and an artificial melancholy; for though he loved his nephew, he preferred Jeanne Antoinette, and though he had married the pair but lately, it had been more out of interest in her than affection for him. Between the

nephew and the niece, if he had to choose, the choice was made. Ties of blood, honour were as nothing to M. de Tournehem before the extraordinary future of Reinette—prepared, if not predicted, by himself. The "dainty for a King" was now the King's and a mere Treasurer could only bow the head. . . . So M. de Tournehem advised the husband to reckon with the wife no more, for she was possessed by a passion so violent that she had not been able to resist it. There was nothing for the third party to do but arrange an amicable and definitive separation. M. Le Normant seems not to have appreciated the honour which the King was doing him. He had not yet attained to that perfection of philosophy proper to husbands in the charming eighteenth century; he was not of genuine courtier stuff, complaisant in all things to the sovereign's will; in short, he was absurd enough to be in love with his wife. He behaved without elegance; he wept, vociferated, and swooned with grief. This weakness, which awakens our sympathy for the unfortunate spouse, must

have seemed very shocking in the uncle's eyes. M. de Tournehem brought his nephew round. Then M. d'Etiolles sought suicidal weapons, and had to be defended against himself. He talked of going to Versailles, of loudly reclaiming Jeanne Antoinette, of tearing her from the very arms of Louis XV. The uncle, not without some difficulty, induced him to stay where he was, to write to his wife and await her reply. The letter written, M. de Tournehem bore it off and gave it himself to Mme. d'Etiolles.

She, quite unmoved—and it is a very ugly page in her story—read the poor tear-stained letter, and in a refinement of indelicacy which we cannot forgive her, handed it to the King to read. It is explicable enough that she should have been insensible to her husband's despair. A woman in love, in the first intoxication of an ill-assured bliss, forgets the tiresome past, and, if it recurs on her path, will pitilessly remove the obstacle. It is only in great souls that love does not annihilate compassion. The soul of Mme. d'Etiolles was not great, and that was largely the fault of those who had formed her.

She believed that the style of an outraged husband would vastly amuse the King; and perhaps she imagined that it would heighten her lover's desire for a mistress so distractedly cherished and regretted by the first proprietor. Clever, ultra-clever, having this much of the courtesan—that she always calculated her actions and turned the smallest circumstances to her profit—she had overshot the mark this time. Louis XV, selfish rather than cruel, may have remembered in his secret heart the kindred sorrows he had caused—the silent suffering of the Queen, the despair of Mme. de Mailly. Did he know that feeling which is barely comprehensible to women, and which they offend so blindly—that mysterious instinct of male solidarity which exists even between rivals, and puts the sons of Adam on their guard against the daughters of Eve? Instead of laughing after he had read M. d'Etiolles' letter, he gave it back to Jeanne Antoinette and coldly said: "Madame, you have a very honest man for a husband."

But the honest man was exiled none the less.

Ordered to make inspection of the Provençal *fermiers-généraux*, he stayed a year at Avignon, where he fell seriously ill. On June 15, 1745, an order of the Châtelet decreed a formal separation of the husband and wife; Mme. d'Etiolles was awarded thirty thousand *livres* out of her dowry, and the custody of her daughter Alexandrine. M. d'Etiolles took a long time to console himself, but he did in the end. His wife had changed her name. She was dead to him. But there were sometimes disagreeable reminders of the spouse who had vanished from his life and heart.

He was one day being publicly entertained in a provincial town where he had been most politely received, for he was in some sort a personage, and moreover remarkably agreeable. One of the party, a noted blockhead, who professed to know all about everything and in reality knew nothing outside his own little town, asked who was "the gentleman to whom everyone was being so polite."

"Is it possible you don't know? That is the husband of the Marquise de Pompadour."

At dessert this gentleman, further enlightened by his neighbours at table, rose, requested silence and, glass in hand: "Monsieur le Marquis de Pompadour," said he, "will you permit me to have the honour of drinking to your very good health?" There was a general sensation of sharp frost, and the hero of the evening pretended he had not heard.

Henceforth, M. Le Normant d'Etiolles returns to a blissful obscurity. There will be no further question of him for many long years; we are to see him but once again, and that from a great distance, when his wife, ailing and apprehensive, shall for a short-lived whim take up religion.

CHAPTER VI

ON May 6, 1745, the King and the Dauphin left to join the army in Flanders; and while the Court upholsterers were re-decorating the white and blue apartments of Mme. de Châteauroux, still redolent of the dead mistress, Mme. d'Etiolles removed from Versailles. The King's fond tyranny consigned her to a country retreat at M. de Tournehem's. She returned, free and triumphant, to that Etiolles where her husband was never again to be seen.

The solitude imposed on her was not excessive. She saw her relatives, and those of M. d'Etiolles. Mme. d'Estrades, her cousin, Mme. de Baschi, her sister-in-law, did not affect any delicacy of view and adored the rising sun. Bernis and Voltaire, confidants and counsellors, were ever at her side. And she had daily letters from the King, sealed with a

gallant device which bore the legend: "Discreet and faithful." Mme. d'Etiolles set much greater store on the fidelity than on the discretion; but she was well aware that the King could not acknowledge her so long as she bore the middle-class name of Le Normant d'Etiolles. By the beginning of July she possessed eighty letters from Louis XV, and the most recent showed the superscription: "To Madame la Marquise de Pompadour." Voltaire immediately wrote the following:

Il sait aimer, il sait combattre;
Il envoie en ce beau séjour
Un brevet digne d'Henri Quatre,
Signé: Louis, Mars et Amour.

Thus did he repay the service rendered him by his fair friend, now his patroness—for she had procured him the office of First Gentleman of the Bedchamber and Historiographer to the King. Voltaire, adroit and business-like, flattered both Queen and Favourite, offering them successively his poem on the Battle of Fontenoy, a somewhat insipid imitation of

Boileau. Let us regard him—this "spoiled child of humanity," this slightly simian philosopher with his frail person desiccated as it were by his consuming intellect, seated in the drawing-room at Etiolles, sipping the Tokay that has been sent by the King; while in the armchair opposite is amply lounging he whom Voltaire calls "Babet the flower-girl"—the kindly Bernis, round and rosy, ladies' man, delight of all the drawing-rooms, better born, better mannered than the philosopher, more intimate than he with the great world and therefore better qualified to guide a novice through the labyrinth of Court existence. The Abbé had not come to Etiolles entirely of his own accord, nor without some scruples of conscience, but at the express request of the King. He had asked the advice of "the most respected persons," and they had urged him to accept Mme. d'Etiolles' invitation. "He came and talked to me about it," records Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault. "I told him that, as he spent his whole time with gay ladies and was very gay himself, it was my opinion that he had more to

gain by being the confidant of the King and his mistress than that of every other fashionable man and woman in the place. Nobody, however, had then any idea of the part that Mme. d'Etiolles was to play at Court, and I flew into a rage when someone predicted that it would be a great one." Bernis had more insight than the Marquis Carillon. He might warble to his little flute—like a shepherd's at the opera—about the dimples of "the youthful Pompadour":

> Deux trous charmants où le plaisir se joue,
> Qui furent faits par la main de l'Amour;

but the Abbé gave useful lessons to the Marquise and, having divined in her nature "a self-love too easily flattered as well as wounded, and in general an excess of distrust which was as quickly aroused as tranquillised," he accustomed her to hear from him an undiluted version of the truth. He could not have rendered her a greater service, and all Voltaire's verses were valueless beside one of the "occasionally ruthless" candours which were mingled with the roses in Babet's bouquets.

This fine summer of 1745—a glorious summer, sonorous with joyous carillons and Te Deums, golden with the glories of Fontenoy, of Ghent, of Bruges, of Oudenarde—was for Mme. de Pompadour a period of cloudless happiness, the like of which she was never again to know. In September a new era began for her with the King's return and the inauguration of her official existence. She was a Marquise; the native plebeian stain was washed out by the decree of the sovereign who, alone, creates his nobility; she bore the pretty name of Pompadour, purchased from the head of an extinct family together with the patronymic estate in the Limousin; but to obtain the freedom of the Court she had still to be presented. There was much speculation as to which great lady would be base enough to serve as sponsor to the ex-demoiselle Poisson. The Abbé d'Aydie, an intimate friend of the Princesse de Conti, said to her a few days before the ceremony:

"What . . . can possibly be going to bring herself to present such a woman to the Queen?"

"Abbé," said the Princess, convulsed with laughter, "say no more, for it is going to be myself."

She did not add that she was playing a rather odious double game, for she had solicited from the King the favour of supporting Mme. de Pompadour, while assuring the Queen that she was yielding to the King's express desire.

This ceremony of presentation implied a complicated ritual, which had to be studied like a part in a comedy or ballet before appearing on the precarious boards of Versailles. Mme. de Pompadour, a skilful dancer and actress, was not embarrassed by the curtsies, and knew by instinct how to move in a Court gown and how to kick back the immense detachable train called the *bas de robe*. It was a different anxiety which beset her. She knew that the event was the talk of Paris, and that already people were settling in their own minds the conversation she would have with the Queen; she knew that her slightest gestures, intonations, her high colour or her pallor, would be scrutinised and commented on. For the devoted friends of

the Queen and the Dauphin, for her ousted rivals, for the jealous intimates, the uneasy Ministers, for each and all of these, what joy if the newly made Marquise should in some way betray the Mlle. Poisson! Very assuredly a great many people did still hope that the "little bourgeoise" would perpetrate some slip, or even some glaring blunder, and be lost because she had been ridiculous. But she had rehearsed the part so well that she was sure of herself when she appeared on September 14th in the King's Apartments. There was a prodigious crowd in the ante-room and the Presence-Chamber. The Princesse de Conti, followed by her Maid of Honour, by Mme. de Lachau-Montauban and Mme. Estrades (the latter had been presented the day before), led in the heroine of the day, magnificently dressed and adorned. Her stately walk consorted with the enormous paniers the heavy train which added to the weight of the brocade Court gown; her little powdered head was glittering with gems; her beautiful neck, her lovely pearly arms, in the semi-nudity of "full dress," defied the criticisms of jealousy.

She made one curtsey at the entrance, a second in the centre of the Presence-Chamber, a third when she drew near to Louis XV, who, flushed and more confused than his mistress, murmured some embarrassed syllables. But now came the most trying moment. After the King, the Queen was to receive Mme. de Pompadour's homage. Running the gauntlet of a far from kindly audience, the Marquise and her supporters reached the domain of Marie Leczinska. The three curtsies accomplished, Mme. de Pompadour having removed the glove from her right hand and made the gesture of raising to her lips the hem of the Queen's skirt, the Queen (as was the established usage at the Court of France) gently withdrew her skirt; and the Marquise, lifting her head, for the first time beheld at close quarters the consort of Louis XV. There was no anger, scarely even melancholy, on the patient face which happiness had once made charming, with its little irregular nose, its penetrating eyes, its mischievous mouth; but which was faded now by frequent tears. At forty-two Marie Leczinska had all the manner

and appearance of an old lady. She no longer wore rouge, and covered her head with a drapery of black lace. This was not a rival; this was hardly a woman; but the noblest soul in all the Court was hers, and she was the Queen. Mme. de Pompadour, moved by profound respect, awaited the first words. They were sure to be few! A mere compliment on her gown, the sort of thing that women who have nothing to say do say. . . . But the Queen was intelligent. It was her desire to frustrate those who had "settled" this conversation, and she bethought her of inquiring about Mme. de Saissac, whom she had known in Paris. Mme. de Pompadour appreciated the benevolent intention, and more agitated than she would have been by a freezing reception, she murmured: "Madame, it is my most ardent desire to please you."

The Duc de Luynes, who witnessed the scene, says that the Queen appeared to be fairly well satisfied by the interview with Mme. de Pompadour. The public, "attentive to the smallest circumstances of this proceeding," declared that

the conversation had been a long one, "that there were twelve sentences."

In this attitude of the Queen's there was a chosen submissiveness of Christian resignation; but there was also perhaps, obscurely, the secret pleasure of retaliation upon the earlier mistresses, and above all on the first, that Mme. de Mailly who had been a rival for Marie Leczinska—the only detested rival, she who had robbed her of the King's heart. The others had not been able to wrest anything from the Queen, for already the Queen had lost everything. The neglected wife had suffered from their insolent triumph, but it was Mme. de Mailly who had dealt the blow that wounded her incurably. Now a new woman had made her appearance, to detach the King from his memories; a woman who, from the first moment of her favour, displayed the most profound respect for the Queen and—wonderful to relate—was not her enemy. . . . Oh, mystery of the feminine heart! The King's scandalous choice—scandalous to all the nobility—could almost reassure the Queen, so vast was the distance between the "little

Etiolles woman" and the crowned consort. It precluded any comparison between the one and the other.

These sentiments of the Queen, unknown to the courtiers and possibly to herself, were thus revealed at the first encounter; and they remained unaltered. The Dauphin had not the same reasons for indulgence. He showed this plainly when he received the débutante with a marble countenance. Obliged by etiquette to embrace her, cheek to cheek, he thrust out his tongue the while, as he had formerly done with Mme. de Châteauroux at a Court Ball. The King, who heard of this affront, sent his son to Meudon in disgrace. The young Prince, in his brief exile, had leisure to plumb the depths of his contempt and hatred for the sinful creature whose presence at Court was an insult to his mother, and was mortally endangering the soul of the King. . . . Thus was fulfilled the prediction of Mme. Lebon, who received as recompense five hundred *livres* from Mme. de Pompadour's private purse. The "Reinette" of Mme. Poisson was in very truth the *reinette* of France.

CHAPTER VII

THERE still exists, under the eaves at Versailles, on a level with the statues of the Chapel wing, a little set of apartments looking out upon the northern parterre. The rudimentary lift, called a "flying chair" or "hoistable seat," which used to save visitors the stiff climb of a hundred stairs, is now no more. Solitude and silence inhabit the three rooms with their grey panellings. If the ghost of Mme. de Pompadour should revisit the abode in twilit hours, it would recognize nothing but the graceful marble chimney-pieces, the panelled walls, the shells carved on the framing of the alcoves; and, through the lofty windows, a green-blue maze of verdure, sparkling water, artfully pruned trees—the finest of Le Notre's landscape gardens, unrolling before the eyes like a splendid Aubusson carpet. Fancy must restore to

this amorous retreat—which consisted of an ante-room, a bedroom, a dining-room enlarged by an alcove and flanked by a pantry where the dinner-dishes were kept hot—the soft-hued silken hangings, the marquetry pieces with their twisted legs, the armchairs, which had to be made so broad to take the feminine paniers, the candelabra, lustres, pictures, and the pretty clavichord which woke to life beneath the slender hands of the Marquise.

There did she live, sheltered from indiscreet curiosity, quite close to those "Little Apartments" of the mezzanine where the King was wont to take refuge from the tedium of the vast state-rooms. Louis XV would come to her in the early mornings; would stay till it was time for Mass, come back afterwards, dine on soup and a cutlet, and often would not retire until six o'clock in the evening. This was a long day, and through the length of it the favourite had to exhaust the resources of an ingenious fancy to keep her lover amused.

In the early days the novelty of love-making, the wonder of two creatures at the revelations

of their hearts and senses, had sufficed to fill the secret hours of intimacy; but the first blaze of desire once allayed by this quotidian intercourse, the mistress perceived that the greatest, rarest triumph for a woman is not the attracting of a lover, but the keeping of him. The better she understood the King's character, the more difficult she felt her amorous rôle to be.

For, before everything else, Louis XV must be amused. Love was to him a remedy for the boredom from which he suffered as from a chronic and incurable disease. Probably he was not innately voluptuous, but had become so in the effort to escape from himself; and his somewhat belated addiction to women—after nine years of morose conjugal fidelity—was a matter perhaps more of curiosity than of temperament. This curiosity, which is often allied to a certain poverty of imagination, and manifests a perpetual need of revival by means of change, can find its satisfaction in no type of mistress, and the thousand and three of Don Juan would leave it still athirst. Mme. de Pompadour was less adequately equipped than

other women to content the prodigious libertine curiosity which infested the King's melancholy soul. Nature had moulded her out of exquisite but ethereal stuff. It was a pallid blood which coursed through that fair flesh, defended by its frigidity from the fatigues of pleasures; and Louis XV was a little disappointed to find Russia succeeding to Poland. It wounded his vanity as a handsome and sensual man. An attendant and confidante, who was loyally attached to the Marquise and who has left some interesting memoirs—that Mme. du Hausset who was such a familiar figure in the Upstairs Apartments that the two lovers took no heed of her and regarded her "like a dog or a cat" —has lifted a corner of the curtain in the royal alcove. We learn from her that "Madame was exceedingly cold in matters of love," and that she tried to stir up somnolent Nature by taking "chocolate flavoured with triple essence of vanilla," truffles, and celery soup. This heating diet seriously deranged her health. A lady-of-honour to the Dauphine, Mme. de Brancas, who had made friends with Mme. de

Pompadour, pointed out to her the real risk she was running and the futility of her régime.

"My dear friend," said Madame to Mme. de Brancas, "I am tormented by the fear of losing the King's heart and ceasing to please him. Men, as you probably know, set great store on certain things, and I have the misfortune to be of extremely cold temperament."

And she added, weeping: "You don't know what happened to me a week ago. The King, on the pretext that it was very hot, went to my sofa and spent half the night there. He will get disgusted with me, and turn to someone else."

"You will not prevent that," replied Mme. de Brancas, "by following your régime, and the régime will kill you. Make your company more and more delightful to the King by your gentleness; do not repulse him at other moments, and leave the rest to time. The chains of habit will attach him to you permanently."

The advice was good, and was dictated by experience. Mme. de Pompadour profited by it. She realised that the only counterpoise to the desire for change is habit, and that the

apathy of Louis XV afforded her a surer hold than his sensuality.

It mattered little that the royal lover was secretly disappointed and irritated at possessing "a sea-bird."[1] The daytime hours are more important than the nocturnal ones in the existence of a man who does not know what to do with his time, and has to be incessantly diverted by new objects. When the King ascended to the Upstairs Apartments, a woman who seemed always new received him with an ever-smiling face. She was the same whom he knew so well, and a hundred others besides—a gardening-enthusiast in a straw hat; a sultana in wide trousers of brocaded silk, with a closely buttoned vest and open neck; a great lady, almost majestic; an animated gay young person, able to tell witty stories wittily. From all that made her so different from the ladies of the Court, from all that might have been destructive to her, she had fashioned the mysterious elements of her power. She had seen so many

[1] *Une macreuse.* "*Macreuse*" is "a species of sea-bird in the Arctic regions" (Larousse).

people, so many things, of which Louis XV had scarcely an idea; she was so charmingly detached from the prejudices which encumbered duchesses! With her musical and artistic talents, her exquisite elegance, her powers of conversation (trained by Voltaire and Fontenelle) this upstart of genius had every trait of the Parisian woman born and bred, who may be nurtured in the gutter and ascend the steps of a throne, who is adaptable to all situations, pliant to all circumstances, capable, if so required, of being a mistress, an artist, a political hostess, a courtesan and even an honest wife and mother; but who is, before all and above all, a woman who desires to please, and pleases.

With her the King gave free rein to his egoism and yielded to his indolence. He, so secretive, so distrustful, surrendered himself as he had never done before—though he had sullen fits of reticence. The Marquise learned to see him as the Duc de Luynes has depicted him—neither animated nor gay, atrabilious, impenetrable, "with an excessive need of violent exercises and dissipation, and moments of black melancholy."

He liked women, but had no turn for gallantry. He was often harsh, and had an extraordinary tendency to long silences, as if speech were positively painful to him. The Marquise submitted to these, detested by all women as they are, because the man, wrapt in his taciturnity, escapes them and disquiets them. She listened without impatience to remarks which were usually about the calendar, the rites and ceremonies of the Church, the detail of illnesses and operations. Louis XV liked talking of death—as do all those who fear it. He thought every invalid must be dying, and was wont to ask them where they proposed to be buried. One day, driving with Mme. de Pompadour and the Maréchale de Mirepoix, he ordered the carriage to stop, called an equerry and said: "Do you see that little hill? There are crosses there; it must be a cemetery. Go and see if there is a newly dug grave."

The equerry obeyed and came back to the King. "There are three graves, Sire, and all of them are newly dug."

"Really," murmured the little Maréchale de Mirepoix, "it makes one's mouth water" . . . while Mme. de Pompadour averted her head in horror.

This predilection for the macabre, and also his unfailing pessimism about every ministerial project, together with the flavour as of dust and ashes taken by the fairest fruits of life upon the lips of the bored sovereign—what are these things but the marks of such an inward lack of balance as to-day would be too lightly characterised as hypochondria, neurasthenia, and the like?

Such was the man in private life, despite the stately bearing and the charming face—a being without intellectual or moral resources, insensible to the arts, uncultured; one of those creatures who are a burden to themselves and others. And it was this man whom the frail Marquise must lift from an abyss of ennui, and support until she well-nigh sank beneath his weight. She succeeded in her task by a miracle of will which slowly consumed and killed her. She irradiated the chequered existence of the Little

Apartments; she dissipated gloom by a song, ill-temper by an improvised anecdote. She accepted the King's tastes instead of imposing her own, and resembled those graceful virtuosi among acrobats who, hanging above their death, with muscles strained and bones displaced, their temples damp from perspiration, yet never cease to smile.

In the evening—three or four times a week—there was a supper party in the Little Apartments or in the Marquise's pretty dining-room. The guests were few—sometimes as many as eighteen, much crowded at the table, as at the supper described by the Prince de Croy.

"Not more than two or three Gentlemen of the Wardrobe waited on us, and they retired after having given everyone the indispensables. Ease and decorum struck me as being both well preserved: the King was lively, unconstrained, but never allowed us to forget his majesty; he did not seem at all shy but very much at ease, talking a great deal and very well; in fact, enjoying himself, as by this time he had learnt to do. He seemed much enamoured of Mme. de

Pompadour and took no pains to conceal it—apparently he has done with shame and made up his mind to affect it no longer, either because he has lost his head or to keep himself from thinking, or what not. He struck me as being very well informed about trifling details of all sorts without being worried by them, and without any commitment of himself on really important matters. *Discretion is part of his being;* nevertheless it is believed that in private he tells the Marquise everything. . . . I thought he talked to her very broadly, as to a mistress whom he loved but with whom he proposed to amuse himself and who was kept for that single purpose; and that she, who is very tactful, had a considerable influence on him, but that the King intended to be always absolute master, and was resolute on that point. . . . We were two hours at table, very much at our ease, but with no excess whatever. Then the King passed into the little drawing-room, where he made his own coffee and poured it out, for no servants appeared there and we waited on ourselves. He played a game of *comète* with Mme. de Pom-

padour, Coigny, Mme. de Brancas, and the Comte de Noailles—low stakes; the King enjoyed the game, but Mme. de Pompadour hated it and seemed to be trying to get him to stop. The rest of the party played two games—low stakes. The King told everyone to sit down, even those who were not playing; I stood leaning against the fire-screen, watching his game. On Mme. de Pompadour urging him to leave off and getting sleepy he rose at one o'clock, and said to her, half-whispering (or such was my impression) and laughing: 'Well, let us go to bed!' The ladies curtsied and withdrew; he bowed us away and secluded himself in the Little Apartments; and the rest of us all went down by Mme. Pompadour's little staircase, where there is a door leading that way; afterwards we returned by the state-rooms to his usual public *coucher*, which took place at once."

During these suppers of the King—which at no point resemble the crapulous orgies now becoming legendary throughout all Europe—Queen Marie too would be at supper with the Duc and Duchesse de Luynes, "her good

people," her true friends. There she would find President Hénault and Moncrif, the Cardinal de Luynes, Nangis (the old courtier who remembered having respectfully loved the Duchesse de Bourgogne), and the Comte de Tressan who, in this quiet circle, represented the spirit of gallantry and licence. Everyone would be seated, in defiance of etiquette; the Queen's dog would be snoring on a cushion; they would talk of old Court days, of dear King Stanislaus, of the little Mesdames at school at Fontevrault, of the Dauphin, of everything dear to the Queen's filial and maternal heart. But sometimes there would fall long silences "in the English manner," and all the company would doze, to be abruptly wakened from their dreamings by the worthy Cardinal de Luynes, who, on one occasion, thinking he was at church, started out of his slumbers and exclaimed imperatively: "Let the Chapter assemble!"

It was to be an oft-recounted tale, which much amused the Queen's little circle. But, in a closer intimacy, must we not suppose that very cautiously there would be mention of her

who, high beneath the statue-crowned eaves, was presiding at the King's supper-party? Oh, assuredly no voice would dare to blame the master; and as to the Marquise, she is regarded favourably: she is courteous, in no way unkind, not a backbiter and quite modest—relatively speaking. She shows the deepest consideration for the Queen, and gently constrains the King to a conjugal deference which he has long forgotten.

Verily, times had changed! Neither Mme. de Mailly, nor Mme. de Vintimille, nor the haughty Duchesse de Châteauroux had shown any of those delicate solicitudes as from woman to woman, which the Queen divined and which a little consoled her for her forlornness. Formerly, no one could have imagined the King sitting down for an instant beside the Queen while she played "*à cavagnole*," or occasionally speaking an almost kindly word to her when she went to visit him of mornings in his own room; even inviting her to Choisy where, as he informed her, there would be "a good dinner, Vespers and Benediction"—all of which things were dear to her.

That visit to Choisy in November, 1745, two months after Mme. de Pompadour's presentation at Court, became a tender memory for the poor Queen. The King received her pleasantly; he did the honours of the transformed palace—the room furnished in white satin, embroidered with gold and chenille, the smaller room in "flowered velvet." In the drawing-room the King, himself standing, suggested that the Queen should sit down; and at the dinner *en maigre* he seemed in quite a good humour—so much so that the Queen "showed no desire to depart, but spoke with a very good grace to Mme. de Pompadour, who was respectful and not at all presuming." On her return, a surprise awaited Marie Leczinska in her apartments at Versailles—they had been cleaned and embellished during her stay at Fontainebleau. The gildings had been renewed and glittered bright; the walls had been hung with tapestries representing scenes from Holy Writ, and the four-post bed had turned into a duchess-bed, with flame-coloured curtains.

These attentions touched the Queen's wounded

heart; for now she was sure of being humiliated and affronted no more. And still dearer to her were some other favours from the King—unhoped-for favours which, through her, had fallen on those whom she loved: the promotion of her old protégé, M. de la Mothe, to the title of Marshal of France, the payment of all his debts—forty thousand *écus*, the deficit of his charity.

After that, can we wonder that the Queen showed a perhaps excessive indulgence to Mme. de Pompadour? Did not Mme. de Pompadour say to Mme. de Luynes that if the Queen had treated her harshly, she would have been genuinely distressed but would never have complained; that in consequence it was not extraordinary that she should lose no opportunity for speaking of the marked favour which the Queen condescended to show her, and should seek every possible occasion of pleasing her. . . . The Duc de Luynes adds that "these sentiments are much approved by the public, and it is observed with pleasure how polite, attentive, gay and even-tempered Mme. de Pompadour always

is. It seems that she is well content, not only with the Queen but even with Mesdames; not ill-pleased, either, with the way Mme. la Dauphine behaves to her, but that the silence, embarrassment and severity of M. le Dauphin, whenever he sees her, cause her much distress; though she never complains, and it is only through her friends that anything is known of it."

For the Dauphin, unappeased, deplored his mother's condescension, the reasons for which he knew and understood. His hostility, which was to be shared by both his wives, Maria-Rafaela and the Princesse de Saxe—who was to replace Maria-Rafaela when she died in 1746—was based upon his royal pride, his filial affection, and his rigid Christian piety. His mentor, the Bishop of Mirepoix, encouraged him in this attitude. The "pious party," afraid to act openly, sought by underhand means to ruin the mistress of the King, the friend and pupil of the philosophers, a sinner and worse—a sceptic, infecting the Court with the detestable spirit of the age, bringing with

her the reverberations of the Paris salons where Voltaire, Diderot, d'Alembert were attacking the Church, in the name of philosophic liberty!

But the bigots were not the only foes of the Marquise. She had to reckon also with the women, the favourite courtiers, and the Ministers.

The women did not forgive her her dazzling fortune. Those who had joined her party, those who went to her suppers, and those, no less, who owed her everything (like her cousin, Mme. d'Estrades), if they did not precisely desire her fall, would not have been displeased if she had paid for her joys by some vexations. Mme. d'Estrades, who was ugly, shameless, venal, nasty (says Marmontel) "in every sense, both in countenance and character," had stooped very low to gain the confidence of the Marquise. Once presented, she had solicited the appointment of Lady of the Bedchamber to Mesdames; and to oblige her, Mme. de Pompadour had by a stratagem constrained the holder of the office to relinquish it. This was the old and venerable Mme. de la Lande, formerly second

governess to the King. The Baron de Montmorency, who had taken part in this transaction, had been rewarded with the blue ribbon. As to Mme. d'Estrades, she was in the future to make use of her situation to become the mistress of M. d'Argenson, the favourite's mortal enemy, and to betray any secrets she might overhear in the King's private apartments. She was to do better still; she was to boast, at Choisy, after a promenade with the King, of having repulsed an attempted violation of her person, which was the exact contrary of the truth. And Mme. du Hausset was one day to write, with indignation, that the Countess had "done more than make advances" to the King, when he was tipsy and defenceless against "that brazen d'Estrades."

Here is the intimate foe, most dangerous of all; here is caressing hypocrisy, installed at the Marquise's table and present at her toilet. Every day, at that charming hour when the courtiers streamed into the Upstairs Apartment wherein the Marquise, smiling before her mirror, received petitions and distributed hopes,

d'Estrades, with ears well-pricked, would move about the room intent on espionage—feigning the fondest friendship with a soul envenomed by jealousy, inventing the evil that she had not been able to discover, so as to injure the friend whose bliss was martyrdom to her, and "make her lover think the more of her."

If hatred dwelt within the Marquise's own domain, what shall we say of the grudges and the spites outside it? The fat Duchesse de Lauraguais, one of the Mailly-Nesle sisters, who had filled the interval between Mme. de Châteauroux and Mme. de Pompadour, in no sense loved by the King and useful only as a stop-gap—how should she not execrate the woman who had triumphed over all? And the ousted rivals, Mesdames de Rohan, de Robecq, de la Mark, how should they not seek to spy out all those places in a woman's armour where the barb of mockery can plant a sharp and grievous wound?

And if feminine malice had been hesitant, many a man would have been ready to stimulate it—secret adversaries of the Marquise from the

first days of her favour, and becoming the more rabid as her influence increased. There was Richelieu, inconsolable for having failed to provide the King with a mistress of his choosing, servile to his interests; there was the Comte d'Argenson; there was Maurepas, the declared enemy of all mistresses. He was the most terrible of all, by reason of his gift for satirical ditties, and for those mordant epigrams, the joy of all the salons, which spared nobody—not even His Royal Majesty—and were the precursors of the satirical pamphlets and infamous lampoons which, under another King, were to befoul not a mere favourite, but a Queen of France.

To these grandees, nurtured in respect for secular hierarchies, rigid precisions of that etiquette which settles precedence and permits of no encroachment upon personal claims, the supreme defect in the Marquise was her origin. Middle-class — nay, lower middle-class — by blood, not even the inheritor of those traditions which the old parliamentary families took pride in as their charter of nobility, she did betray

her extraction. She might be intelligent, cultivated, witty, and gracious, but in her very courteousness there lacked the well-nigh imperceptible shade of difference which constitutes "good form" and "good style."

"Good style," as defined by Mme. de Genlis, is "the choice of lofty and delicate expressions, the knowledge of what is due to each individual, according to age, merit, and rank"; it is a natural courtesy, a full experience in those usages which lent a grace to social life in a period when virtue was easily dispensed with, but fine manners never. . . . Well-bred people do not use certain expressions which are current in middle-class and vulgar circles. They do not say "*Je vous salue*" on meeting or parting. They do not make one another *cadeaux* but *présents*, the word *cadeau* being looked upon as ignoble. They do not go to the Français, but to the *Comédie Française;* they do not drink champagne, but *vin de champagne;* they do not give *louis d'or*, but *louis en or*. Every proverbial locution is banished from their speech, every unnecessary word removed from the

language, for such things cast a shade of languor and tedium over the conversation.

Now Mme. de Pompadour, refined and cultivated though she was, did not, as yet, possess this ultra-delicacy of expression. She had been known to speak as they did at François Poisson's—or like her friend Duclos, the cynical philosopher, at Mme. d'Epinay's suppers when he took a fancy to shock his fellow-guests. The Duc de Luynes notes, not unkindly, if not wholly unmaliciously, that "Mme. de Pompadour, so far from being arrogant, continually talks of her relatives, even in the King's presence. Possibly she too often brings up this topic. Moreover, as she could not be very well-versed in the forms of speech habitual to circles in which she had not been accustomed to move, she frequently makes use of terms and expressions which in her present latitudes appear extraordinary. Some days ago she was speaking of one of her cousins-german who is a monk, and who had been sent to one of the houses of his Order for purposes of companionship with M. Poisson, who has been living in the neigh-

bourhood for some time. Mme. de Pompadour had been curious to see this monk, in order to be of service to him, and she had not been pleased—she had found him unintelligent, and said to someone who went to call on her: 'That cousin of mine is a queer instrument (*plaisant outil*). What can one make out of machinery like that?' There is reason to believe that the King is often embarrassed by these phrases and these family details."

These suggestive expressions, this gossipy style, were grist to the Lauraguais mill, and caused Louis XV to say rather uneasily to his confidants: "Something to learn in that quarter! It will amuse me to turn teacher."

A Cabal was formed against *la robine*[1]—a cabal which spread to Parisian circles, and the echo of whose mockeries in time reached the ears of the vulgar. A Gascon hairdresser, who had been made the fashion by Mme. de Châteauroux and the Dauphine's ladies, for a long time refused to dress the head of a *Mme.*

[1] *Robin* is a familiarly contemptuous term for *un homme de robe* —a lawyer; the allusion was to the class of society which Mme. de Pompadour had formerly frequented. [Translator's Note.]

Le Normant d'Etiolles; and when he was obliged to yield and repair to the Marquise's dressing-room, she asked him the reasons for his extraordinary vogue. He replied heroically, before all the assembled company: "Madame, I used to dress *the other one's* hair!"

And soon all Paris was amusing itself by retailing those anonymous ditties, those *Poissonades*, which were attributed, not without some appearance of truth, to Maurepas:—

Les grands seigneurs s'avilissent,
Les financiers s'enrichissent,
C'est le règne des vauriens—rien—rien.
On épuise la finance
En bâtiments, en dépense,
L'Etat tombe en décadence,
Le roi ne met ordre à rien—rien—rien.

Une petite bourgeoise,
Elevée à la grivoise,
Mesurant tout à sa toise,
Fait de la cour un taudis—dis—dis.
Louis, malgré son scrupule,
Froidement pour elle brûle,
Et son amour ridicule
A fait rire tout Paris—ris—ris.

Cette catin subalterne
Insolemment le gouverne
Et c'est elle qui décerne
Les honneurs à prix d'argent—gent—gent.
Devant l'idole, tout plie,
Le courtisan s'humilie,
Il subit cette infamie
Et n'est que plus indigent—gent—gent.

La contenance éventée,
Et chaque dent tachetée,
La peau jaune et truitée
Les yeux froids et le cou long—long—long.
Sans esprit, sans caractère,
L'âme vile et mercenaire,
Le propos d'une commère,
Tout est bas chez la Poisson—son—son.

Si dans les beautés choisies,
Elle était des plus jolies,
On pardonne des folies,
Quand l'objet est un bijou—jou—jou.
Mais pour si plate figure,
Pour si sotte créature
Exciter tant de murmure,
Chacun juge le roi fou—fou—fou.

CHAPTER VIII

MME. DE POMPADOUR defended herself, for the King's would have been an inadequate championship. He was weak with Richelieu, who was the accomplice of his pleasures; he appreciated the services of the Comte d'Argenson, despite the bad style of that nobleman whose filthy language scandalised the diplomats; he clung to Maurepas, who with his supple facile mind made work a recreation. There was, moreover, for all his infatuation, a fundamental secret love of contradiction in Louis XV, as it were an impulse to "get back his own." In those early years, the period of the Upstairs Apartments, the Marquise was all grace, all patience, all discretion. It was as though she apologised for her good luck. When she lost her mother in December, 1745, and the King,

touched by her grief, offered to give up a trip to Marly, she refused to upset such plans as concerned the whole Court, because *she* happened to be in deep mourning; and it was she, perhaps, who suggested to Louis XV the singular idea of giving, as a New Year present to Marie Leczinska, the magnificent gold and enamel snuff-box which he had ordered for Mme. Poisson. If the Dauphin and Mesdames still execrated the favourite and called her coarsely "*maman p . . .*," she declined to hear the reverberations of that insult. If the gentle Queen had lightning-moments of relapse into feminine malice, the Marquise was ever unchangingly respectful. She could console herself by listening, at a supper-party at Choisy, to the King's voice singing a couplet of her own composition about the Father of Mankind:

> Il n'eut qu'une femme avec lui,
> Encor, c'était la sienne;
> Ici, je vois celles d'autrui,
> Et n'y vois point la mienne.

The King's gaiety—that was her guerdon, that was the Marquise's fondest care; and

when the handsome black-eyed face deigned to light up, Mme. de Pompadour knew the sensations of a conqueror. For that, it was well worth while to set aside her rancour, to await her hour and feign some deference to Richelieu—until the day when she could annihilate him. He was the deviser of amusements, the organiser of supper-parties, and worse things than they. She herself was later on to go almost as far as he in complaisance. In the spring-time of her favour, she showed such genius as to invent a wholly novel amusement for the Unamusable—that theatre of the Petits Cabinets which was a graceful pretext for incessant renewal of a beauty all fine shades, already menaced by time and habit.

In a gallery of the Palace, near the Medal Room, a charming little play-house was run up. M. de Tournehem, now by favour of his pretty niece Director-General of Edifices, in place of Orry (who had been disgraced), undertook to furnish the stock and the costumes. The company and the orchestra comprised high personages and such of their dependants as were good

musicians; there were Mesdames de Brancas and de Sassenage, the Marquise de Livry and the ravishing, witty Mme. de Marchais, wife of the First Gentleman of the Bedchamber, rival of Mme. Geoffrin, and the "providence" of candidates for the Academy. There were also the Ducs de Chaulnes, de Nivernois, d'Ayen; MM. de Sourches, de Meuse, de Gontaut, de Maillebois. The Duc de La Vallière was manager, Moncrif acting manager, and the Abbé de la Garde prompter and secretary. Of the choristers and instrumentalists, the majority were professionals lent by the Chapelle or the Paris Opera House.

"Queer animals to manage—a troop of actors," said Molière. The Marquise soon perceived that discipline is as necessary in the theatre as in the army, and that people of quality, when dressed up as actors, quickly acquire the professional outlook and its demerits. She requested the King's collaboration in drawing up a code of regulations to be obeyed by all the performers. This pleasant document has been preserved—the pink and blue reins

which were to bridle vanities and jealousies so gently:—

1. For admission to membership, it will be necessary to prove that it is not the first time a candidate has acted, as it is not desired to have any novices in the company.

2. Members will select the type of part they wish to fill.

3. Without the consent of all the members, no member shall undertake a different type of part from that which has been agreed upon.

4. In case of absence, no member may select his own understudy; this right is expressly reserved to the company, who will take a vote upon the question.

5. On the member's return, he shall resume his part.

6. No member may refuse a part of his chosen type, on the pretext that it does not suit his style, or is too arduous. These first six articles apply to actresses as well as to actors.

7. The actresses alone shall have the right of choosing the pieces to be performed by the company.

8. They shall likewise have the right of appointing the day of performance, and of deciding on the number of rehearsals and the days and hours for these.

9. Each actor is bound to be present at the precise hour arranged for the rehearsal, under penalty of a fine which the actresses alone shall decide between themselves.

10. Actresses are given half an hour's grace, after which the fine incurred by them shall be decided by the actresses alone.

Never were the regulations of a theatre drawn up more gallantly! Here is the authentic spirit of that age of feminine supremacy in matters of social recreation. There is no doubt that Louis XV took quite as much pleasure in the performances at the Little Theatre as his great-grandfather had in those at Saint-Cyr; but Pompadour was not Maintenon. It was not now a question of amusing the godly senility of a sovereign who was converted from sin and paternally touched by the "innocent doves" of Racine. Instead of great tragic verse, here was light playful verse; instead of sacred

choruses were ariettas; instead of modest caps and lengthy skirts were brilliant garments, billowing inordinately, loaded with blonde laces, garlands, and festoons; instead of scriptural drama, light opera or comedy and sometimes high comedy—for the inaugurative play, chosen by Mme. de Pompadour and acted before fourteen persons, on January 17, 1747, was *Tartuffe*.

This choice proclaims the Voltairian, the friend of the Encyclopædists. Pompadour-Dorine, proud to display her dazzling neck and shoulders, refuses the deceptive handkerchief offered her by the hypocrite; and, mocking the "Imposter," hopes to enfeeble, in the King's own mind, those religious scruples which too often recur to haunt him . . . But Molière was too serious, or else it was too melancholy a gaiety which underlay the sparkle of his burlesque, to do full justice to the fragile graces of the favourite. She eventually came to prefer a slighter type of comedy, an airier satiric touch —pieces that savoured more of things as they actually were, such as Dangeau's *Trois Cousines*,

de la Chaussée's *Préjugé à la Mode*, Dufresny's *Mariage fait et rompu*. And as she proposed to neglect no opportunity of pleasing, she revealed herself as a *cantatrice* as well as an actress. Her voice, the fine expression of her personality, delicate and subtle as herself—little real power but much art—was not unequal to the great recitatives and arias of *Acis et Galathée*, *Phaéton*, *Armide;* and she was at her most delightful ease in the tender artless melodies of the *Devin du Village*.

The success of the first performances resounded far beyond the Medal Room. All the Palace was excited, and all Paris. Those about the Court became conscious of hitherto unsuspected dramatic talents. Mme. du Hausset, on this subject, has a curious anecdote. "At the time when there was acting in the Little Apartments, I procured a Lieutenancy to the King for one of my relatives by a singular circumstance, which is a striking proof of the value set by exalted persons on the most trivial means of access to Court circles. Madame did not like to ask anything from M. d'Argenson. Urged by my family, who could not conceive

of my having any difficulties to get over, in my position, if I wanted to obtain a minor command for a subaltern officer, I decided to try what an interview with M. d'Argenson would do. I laid my request before him and handed him a memorandum. He received me coldly and said nothing definite. I left the room. M. le Marquis de Voyer, his son, who was there and had heard everything, came after me. 'You are asking,' said he, 'for a certain command. There is a vacant one which has been promised me for one of my friends. But if you like to make an exchange of favours and get something for me, I will let you have it. I should like to be a *police-officer*, and you can obtain the post for me. I told him that I could not imagine what the joke was. 'This is what it is,' he said. 'They are going to act *Tartuffe* in the Apartments. Get Madame to give me that part, and the appointment is yours.' I made no promises, but I told the story to Madame. That did the business; I got the appointment for my relative, and M. de Voyer thanked Madame as if she had had him made a Duke."

Around the Queen and the Dauphin the pious party was muttering; but the virtuous Queen herself, who did not greatly care for the theatre, did yield to the woman's familiar spirit of curiosity. . . . Her faithful reader, Moncrif, author of *Les Chats*, had written the book for a musical play; and a little intoxicated by puerile vanity, he brought the text of his masterpiece, after the performance, to the Queen's rooms. Marie Leczinska glanced at it, and sobered the author by a single brief comment: "Moncrif, this is very good, but let this suffice!" We may suppose that there was no more talk of the theatre that evening.

But Mme. de Pompadour, who laid her plans with the tenacity, secrecy, and patience of the feminine will, had made up her mind that the Queen should come to her theatre, and with the Queen, the Dauphin and Dauphine. She managed to obtain from the King a favour which the Queen had set her heart upon—the promotion of M. de la Mothe, who was made a Marshal of France. Marie Leczinska was told the news at the King's *lever*, and as she bent

in her joy and emotion to kiss her husband's hand, Louis XV embraced her—a most infrequent boon! He told her that he had not cared to invite her to the last performance at his Petits Cabinets, because the piece was a little broad; but they were shortly to do another which might amuse her, and she would gratify him by coming to see it.

The Queen, says M. de Luynes, thought the King had been "charming"; and on the following Saturday she appeared at the theatre. Seated beside the King, she listened to the comedy "which might amuse her," as Louis XV had said; and she must have asked herself what sort of amusement the King had had in mind, for this comedy was the *Préjugé à la Mode*, where conjugal love was turned into ridicule! An operetta, *Erigone*, by Mondonville, terminated the performance. Marie Leczinska, at her leisure, could contemplate her rival, dressed in a bodice of white taffeta covered with silver traceries, the draperies and cuff-trimmings of the same silver-patterned taffeta, adorned with *appliqués* of flowers.

Around her hovered the Duc d'Ayen as Bacchus, M. de la Salle as Sylvain, with "a coat of dead-leaf taffeta from the costumes provided by the Privy Purse," eleven singing Fauns, a young gentleman called Piffet as Cupid, two young ladies called Puvignée and Camille "dressed as statues," with "*appliqués* of festoons and flowers, their bracelets, sleeve-knots and collars of white ribbon, edged with white chenille, and their plumes composed of artificial flowers." Four other young ladies wore "dresses provided by the Privy Purse, altered to fit them, of white taffeta veiled with Italian gauze."

The Queen's presence at the theatre of the Little Apartments stopped the bigots' tongues, which had been too openly denouncing the King; but the public also was grumbling. The construction of a new play-house in the cage of the great Escalier des Ambassadeurs had cost, it was said, two million *livres*. Mme. de Pompadour protested: "No—only twenty thousand *écus!* Might not the King spend that much on his own pleasure?" In reality

Louis XV had spent seventy-five thousand *livres* on the new theatre.

The seats reserved for the King and the royal family faced the stage, and on each side two balconies and a gallery could accommodate forty spectators. The orchestra consisted of as many musicians. They gave *Les surprises de l'Amour*, book by Gentil-Bernard and Moncrif, music by Rameau. It was but moderately successful, despite the talents of Venus-Pompadour, dressed in a "basqued bodice of blue material encrusted with silver and trimmed with blue chenille on silver net; the cloak of painted taffeta, trimmed with similar net; the long train of the blue material, also trimmed with the net; the skirt of white taffeta, with large festoons of painted taffeta likewise trimmed with blue chenille on silver net, and a double twist of the same net; rosettes of blue ribbon encrusted with silver and trimmed with silver fringe."

This was followed by an opera by Campa, *Tancrède*, rather coldly received; than *La Mère Coquette*, by Quinault; and a very pretty pan-

tomime, *L'Opérateur Chinois*, for which Moncrif had written the book and M. de Courtevaux the music. This displayed the China of a Chinese screen, travestied in the taste of the eighteenth century with a village fair, open booths, a quack dentist and an angling philosopher. The company's greatest triumph was in January, 1749, the performance of *Acis et Galathée*, by Campistron and Lully. Cochin's engraving has preserved for posterity a picture of the pretty new house, with the royal family seated facing the stage—where, amid rocks and verdure, Acis and Galatea bewail their fate. The Vicomte de Rohan, as Acis, wears the singular costume of operatic shepherds: a basqued coat of cherry-coloured material encrusted with gold, the trunks as puffy as a ballet-dancer's skirt, the sleeves and little collar in silver watered-silk; a trailing cloak of blue and silver, a cherry-coloured and silver wallet; and every movement that he made must have set up a glitter of spangles in the folds of the gorgeous silks.

Standing with bent head before him, Galatea

stretches out her arms pathetically. Her powdered head, her semi-naked arms, appear attenuated by contrast with the enormous width of her spreading paniers. The skirt of white taffeta, "painted with reeds, foam, and shells" —for the nymph Galatea was a goddess of the sea—billows upon the invisible framework which completely concealed the actual form of a woman. The bodice of pale rose-coloured taffeta, the drapery of narrowly striped silver and green *gaze d'eau*, the green cloak lined with white taffeta—the whole array of textures, embroideries, spangled tissues, in the tricolour of white, rose, and green, suggesting the iridescence of a sea shell, is decorated with tassels and "bars" of pearls. The actress, thus attired, is no longer a woman. Unreal as a visitor from lands of faery, she startles, stimulates, revives her lover's amorous desires. That fascination of the actress which so powerfully works upon the senses and imagination of the male, now works upon the King. He yields, enchanted; and if by chance he glances at his right-hand neighbour, quickly must he glance

away, lest with the brilliant vision should be mingled the depressing sight of Marie Leczinska, muffled like an old woman in her everlasting black lace head-dress!

But in Paris the public was offended. If the salons and the philosophers defended the Marquise—had she not shown her appreciation of the new ideas and talents by acting Voltaire's *Alzire*?—the pamphleteers denounced the waste of public money and the bad example shown by the King. "Lindor," wrote one of them, "precluded by his greatness from taking a theatre-girl, does as a proud Prince may. A large house is built for him, a theatre erected on purpose for his mistress there to figure as his titular and official ballet-girl. O men than whom the vainest of these dancing-women is not vainer; O ye blind Candaules, think not that the last Gyges perished in Lydia!"[1]

And hear the Marquis d'Argenson, personal enemy of the Marquise: "There has just been printed a most ridiculous collection of the en-

[1] *L'Ecole de l'homme ou Parallèle des portraits du siècle et des tableaux de l'Ecriture Sainte*, par Dupuis (?).

tertainments at His Majesty's Cabinets or Little Apartments—lyrical pieces, wretched toadying things. There one may peruse the list of dancers and singers, of officials and clowns, of great Court ladies and theatre-girls. In fact, the King spends his time nowadays in watching the Marquise and the rest of them being trained by all the professional actors, who are hail-fellow-well-met with the monarch to an extent which is sacrilegious and ungodly."

The King felt that he must concede something to public opinion. He suppressed the theatre of the Little Apartments—and resuscitated it at the Castle of Bellevue.

There Mme. de Pompadour was at home. She received only the King's most intimate friends in the little theatre with its Chinese scheme of decoration. There she produced comedies and ballets: *L'Amour Architecte*, *Zeleika*, *Vénus et Adonis*, *L'Impromptu de la Cour de Marbre*, a charming fantasy by Favart and Lagarde; and finally, to close her theatrical career, that exquisite little work by Rousseau,

Le Devin du Village, which was revived in 1753 with Mlle. Fel as Colette.

In this revival of an opera which had pleased the King, the Marquise saw an opportunity of being useful to Rousseau. She liked literary people—liked them in remembrance of her girlhood, and as a relief from the ennui of the Court. Moreover she sincerely (and admirably) desired—certain people had pronounced this to be middle-class—to enhance, before an arrogant aristocracy, the dignity of those who nowadays are called "intellectuals." She was of their race and of their world; and ambitious as she was, attached as she was to the grandeurs she had gained and would not at any price have relinquished, she wanted these grandeurs to be advantageous to her family, to the friends whom she had never disowned, and to the friends of those friends. What neither Montespan nor Maintenon had done, she—François Poisson's daughter—was to do for her royal lover's glory and her own, the royal mistress's. She was to establish manufactures—to bring forth, by a gesture of her slender fingers, the enchanting

little world that populates Sèvres porcelain; she was to reign over the museums and studios, stimulate the imagination of artists, receive them as friends, talk to them of their art as can the genuine amateur who has handled the pencil and the graving-tool; she was to draw up the plans of Crécy and Bellevue with the architects, direct the decorators, permit La Tour—for better freedom in his work—to doff his cap, his wig, his garters; she was to converse at ease before her mirror with the kindly Bernis, the good gruff Duclos, the youthful Marmontel, the excellent Doctor Quesnay . . . what a pleasure, what a relaxation, for a woman subject to the rigid discipline of etiquette and the fatigues of joyless love! These dear delights would have been futile and even dangerous if the King had not had the illusion of sharing them. Now Louis XV was not a bookish man, still less an artistic one; deprived as he had been of any real instruction, he had nothing of his great-grandfather's natural love of the beautiful and the noble—but he was a child of the charming eighteenth century, and he moved

within the marvellous frame of Versailles. He had acquired from things, and not from people, that subtle cultivation of taste which he possessed in common with all his contemporaries. Impervious to the sublime, he was keenly sensible of grace; and grace was everywhere around him—grace in gardens, in drawing-rooms, in trinkets, in women's dress and in the women whom the dress embellished. Was it not the grace of the Marquise which had charmed him, rather than her beauty? Under these influences, he became sensitive to some voluptuous expressions of the arts. He could take delight in the delicate sensuousness of certain paintings, certain musical compositions, of whose technical qualities he knew nothing; and his interpretation of them was neither false nor forced nor vulgar, superficial and incomplete though it might be. In that, he was a man of his time —of that time when it was well-nigh impossible to find a single absolutely ugly object, when the most humble citizen, the artisan, even the peasant, never handled anything that was not fitted to enchant an artist's eye.

But this sensibility, which was common to every Frenchman of his epoch, stopped short at the prettiness of things. It had no influence upon ideas; it did not, in the supine King, awaken any lofty intellectual curiosity, nor any admiration for men of talent. Louis XV—and not without good reason—dreaded great minds as though they were destructive elements; and if he was proud that his reign had produced Voltaire, he feared without esteeming the philosopher, perceiving him to be as vain as he was covetous, and moreover suspicious, jealous of his compeers, full of disquieting contradictions, exceeding all bounds in flattery as well as in disparagement and ingratitude. "I have treated him," said the King, "as well as Louis XIV treated Racine and Boileau. I gave him an appointment as First Gentleman, and pensions. Is it my fault if he made a fool of himself, set up pretensions to be Chamberlain, wanted to be given a cross and sit at my supper table? Such things are not done in France." . . . Louis XV, who was no keen psychologist, saw rightly here; and Mme. de Pompadour's

brother, Abel Poisson, now Marquis de Vaudières et Marigny, confirmed the King's judgment. "Voltaire's fancy was always to be an Ambassador, and he did everything he could think of to make people imagine him entrusted with political affairs when he first went to Prussia." To Louis XV, such a pretension could seem nothing but the height of indecency and absurdity.

Moreover, if Louis XV could not comprehend the genius of Voltaire, Voltaire had no better grasp of the King's character; and he sometimes made mistakes, as too self-confident clever people are prone to do. When Mme. de Pompadour produced the ballet, *Le Temple de la Gloire*, in which Louis XV was plainly designated under the name of Trajan, Voltaire, watching for the King's departure, threw himself at his feet and loudly exclaimed: "Well, Trajan! Did you recognise yourself?" Louis XV passed on without replying, and his countenance was glacial.

Later, when the favourite heard of the distress of her old master, Crébillon, and on an honour-

able impulse summoned the poet to Versailles, the details of the interview inflamed Voltaire's frenetic jealousy. Crébillon was shown in to Mme. Pompadour, who was ailing and in bed; and having thanked her, he kissed her hand. Just as he did so, the King entered. "Ah, Madame," said the old man slily, "the King has surprised us—I am lost." The King deigned to smile, and confirmed the promised donation of a hundred *louis* from his privy purse, with an apartment in the Louvre. Better still, he interested himself in the publication of *Catilina*, which was printed at the Treasury's expense by the Royal Printing Press.

Voltaire could not forgive the Marquise this kindness to an unsuccessful poet. He withdrew to Ferney in a rage; and after all the madrigals to the lovely "Pompadounette," now wrote some rather nasty little verses and transferred his heart to the King of Prussia. . . . The Marquise's premature death inspired him with some remorse, though rancour still possessed him. He wrote to the Comte d'Argental: "Though Mme. de Pompadour did countenance

that vile work *Catilina*, I am so good-natured that I still could be fond of her." And to Damilaville: "Depend upon it, my dear colleague, real men of letters and real philosophers have good reason to mourn Mme. de Pompadour." He was right; for philosophers and men of letters owed much to the Marquise, and had caused *her* various unpleasantnesses, since they belong to a race which is never satisfied, no matter what is done to oblige them.

Mme. de Pompadour experienced this again with Rousseau, when Voltaire was done with. *Le Devin du Village* had made Jean Jacques the fashion; and Duclos, meeting the musical philosopher at Mme. d'Epinay's, took a liking to him. He was very intimate with the favourite, and aroused her interest in the Genevese bear by depicting those manners which were odder even than his odd appearance. When Mme. de Pompadour produced *Le Devin du Village* at Fontainebleau, Jean Jacques consented to superintend the last rehearsal, "bashful as a school boy" among the brilliant actresses from the Opera. Sulky because timid, inca-

pable of social graces, he affected to despise good manners since he could not learn to practise them—which is the case with many cynics. The day of performance arrived. He appeared in his customary negligent attire, with his bushy beard and wig unbrushed; and he was assigned a place in M. de Cury's box, facing the little box in which the King sat with Mme. de Pompadour. When the candles were lit, Jean Jacques, a prey to the morbid self-consciousness of neuropaths, persuaded himself that he had been given this prominent position only to "make a show" of him before the Court, and he began to feel ashamed of his beard and his wig. "I asked myself," he wrote in his *Confessions*, "if I were in my rightful place, and rightly dressed; and after some minutes of discomfort I answered myself by a Yes, and that with an intrepidity which probably derived more from the impossibility of leaving than from the force of my reasoning. I said to myself: I am in my rightful place because I am watching my own work being acted, because I am invited to occupy this place, because I wrote my piece

to be acted, and because, when all is said, no one has more right than I to enjoy the fruit of my talents. I am dressed as I usually am, neither better nor worse; if once again I begin to enslave myself to opinion in anything, I shall quickly be obliged, as before, to enslave myself to it in everything; my outward man may be plainly and carelessly arrayed, but it is neither slovenly nor dirty; a beard is not so in itself, since it is Nature which provides it, and if climate or fashion ordains, it may rank as an ornament. . . ."

While he was making these reflections, which assuredly derived from no excess of either simplicity or modesty, the King, the Marquise, and the Court were applauding the charming pastoral, and observing the author with an astonishment entirely devoid of malice. Here was a new problem for Jean Jacques. He was armed against raillery, but not against "caressing manners." The success had developed into a triumph. The author heard all round him whisperings of women who to him seemed fair as angels, and were saying in low voices:

"That is charming; that is ravishing; there is not one note but speaks to the heart." The pleasure of giving pleasure to so many charming people moved him to such a degree that he began to cry into his big beard, and yielded himself wholly to the joy of savouring his glory. . . . The spell of sex, he acknowledged, had much more to do with it than an author's vanity; and Jean Jacques would have shed fewer tears if only men had been present.

That same evening the Duc d'Aumont sent him word to be at the Palace next day about eleven o'clock, when he would be presented to the King; and M. de Cury, charged with this agreeable message, added that there was talk of a pension, and that the King would himself inform the father of Colette and Colin upon the matter. But the philosopher's patrons had not reckoned with his hypochondria. Jean Jacques spent a terrible night. He reminded himself of his disabilities, the "frequent need to retire" which had tormented him during the spectacle, and would certainly torment him when he should be awaiting the King's

passage through the great gallery. The very thought of the state he could get into when his need was on him was enough to make him experience it to the point of fainting, or else of making such an awful exhibition that he would sooner far have died. And then he imagined himself in His Majesty's presence, being graciously addressed. . . . How was he to look, how answer, "without dropping the uncompromising air and manner," which, with the beard, were part of his philosophic livery? Again, what would his rivals say if the disinterested Swiss, contemner of honours and fortune, should accept a pension? And would that pension be paid? . . . Before these difficulties, offspring of a fevered brain, Jean Jacques took flight, giving the go-by to honours, pensions, King, King's Mistress, and the courtiers all and sundry. He consoled himself for the loss of the pension by cursing society, and also by reflecting that all day long the King went about humming the *ariettas* from *Le Devin*—with the most untuneful voice in his Kingdom.

Mme. de Pompadour forgave this prank of him whom she called "the owl," and sent him fifty *louis*. Jean Jacques acknowledged them ungraciously; and later, when *La Nouvelle Héloïse* appeared, he wrote, meaning no harm, that "a charcoal-burner's wife was more to be respected than a King's mistress." M. de Malesherbes pointed out to him that this assertion might wound Mme. de Pompadour. Then Rousseau thought to set all right by replacing the word "King" by the word "Prince"—and thus offended his benefactress, Mme. de Luxembourg, the more than intimate friend of the Prince de Conti.

Montesquieu, Buffon, d'Alembert, Diderot, Marmontel, Piron, and many others were on various occasions made sensible of Mme. de Pompadour's intelligent friendliness. She defended the *Encyclopædia* most brilliantly and courageously. It is Voltaire himself who tells this charming anecdote: "One of Louis XV's servants told me one day that when his master the King was at a small supper-party at Trianon, the conversation turned first upon hunting,

then upon gunpowder. 'It is odd,' said the Duc de Nivernois, 'that we should amuse ourselves every day by shooting partridges in the Park at Versailles, and sometimes by killing men and getting killed ourselves on the frontiers, without knowing precisely what all the killing is being done with.' 'Alas! we are in that state of ignorance about everything in this world,' replied Mme. de Pompadour; 'I don't know what the rouge I put on my cheeks is made of, and I should be very much put to it if anyone asked me how the silk stockings I am wearing now were manufactured.' 'It is a pity,' then said the Duc de La Vallière, 'that His Majesty has confiscated our Encyclopædias, which cost us each a hundred *pistoles*. . . . There we should find the answers to all our questions.' The King defended his confiscation. He had been warned that the twenty-one folio volumes which were to be found on every lady's dressing-table were the most dangerous things in the world for the Kingdom of France, and had wished to find out for himself if this were true before permitting the book

to be read. Towards the end of supper he sent three pages to look for a copy; they came back, each with seven volumes, which were extremely heavy to carry. The article on *Powder* was referred to, and there we read that so-and-so was so on and so forth; and Mme. de Pompadour learnt the difference between the old Spanish rouge with which the ladies of Madrid used to redden their cheeks, and the rouge of the ladies of Paris. . . . She learnt likewise how her stockings were woven, and the mechanism for this fairly astounded her. 'Ah, what a splendid book,' she cried. . . . 'Sire, have you confiscated this storehouse of valuables so that you, alone possessing it, may be the only learned man in your kingdom?'"

Louis XV would have cared for science if he had not feared the scientists. The Marquise's intervention was unavailing.

CHAPTER IX

ONE by one the goodly years go by, the brief years of love; they go by amid intrigues and pleasures, and the Marquise's wearied youth already feels the chill of a declining day. In the evenings, after the theatre, after the King's supper, she who has been Galatea or Colette reascends the little sombre staircases to her pretty room in the Upstairs Apartments. The Master will be here directly. She must get rid of the great heavy gown, the "frame" (of wire hung on ribbon-ladders), the flowers, jewels, feathers; and must then begin her toilet for the night, with all a courtesan's solicitude. To be lovely through the day and through the night, at every hour, in every garb, despite all secret worries and all feminine distresses—what a burden, what an

effort! Now the gown is shed; the hair is loosened in a fragrant cloud, the perfumed water is cooling in the silver basin, and her women, busied round the half-undressed Marquise, are creating the dainty disorder of a little libertine picture. One covers the fire with ashes as with a diaphanous grey veil; another draws the sumptuous great curtains of the alcove; another warms the luxurious bed, afroth with laces; yet another extinguishes the candles, and with them their reflections in the long pier-glasses. Then they depart. Madame is alone, save for her faithful du Hausset. In the oval mirror of the toilet-table, she examines her "midnight face," the face beheld by love alone, the face which love must find unaltered in its infinite diversity. Alas! this fair fruit of the flesh is bruised already, marked and veined by tiny blemishes, lined with those faintest wrinkles which the paint can still so easily dissemble, but which will soon show through the paint. The slightly prominent eyes are deeply, darkly circled; the lips are pale; the delicate texture of the neck and throat begins to wilt; and all

this beauty, with its thirty years upon it, shows the stealthy progress of a lurking malady within that hidden organism which is the source and essence of a woman's energy.

Illness, passion's bugbear! Shuddering, Mme. de Pompadour reflects that she has not the right to be ill. . . . One day that she was feeling worse than usual, during a sojourn at Choisy, she excused herself from going down to the drawing-room. Louis XV twice demanded her presence, and when they told him again that she was not in a fit state to appear, he sharply inquired: "Is she feverish?" "No, Sire." "Then let her come down!"

Louis XV's blood spoke there, in that unconscious egoism. The great-grandfather had disliked anyone to be ill, and in his carriage he would drive long miles with ladies in full dress who—feverish or convalescent, pregnant or but recently confined—had to endure the sun, the wind, the jolting without ever making moan. . . . Mme. de Pompadour sees the hour approaching when she will no longer be able not to complain. She feels, aghast, the

irregular pulsation of her heart, the instability of her overwrought nerves, the profound disorder left in all her organs by maternities miscarried and unavowed. She is wasting away in this existence which she calls—like that of the Christian—a perpetual combat; and the dazzling summit of her fortunes reached, she now surveys, confronting her, the path which is to lead her downward on the farther slope.

How very swiftly she has climbed, how very surely, to the crest! What obstacles she has surmounted, and what enemies overthrown! The Queen and the Dauphine—they are not won, but they are neutral now; the courtiers have been beguiled; the Ministers reduced to some sort of obedience; the stain of Poisson ignobility is wiped off—her father is rehabilitated, her young brother Abel, whom the King familiarly calls "little brother" (*frérot*), is now the Marquis de Vaudières de Marigny, and soon will be Director-General of Edifices; her darling Alexandrine is being brought up like a princess at the Convent of the Assumption . . . what a long road she has travelled since the

meetings on those hunting-days at Sénart! The Marquise is prodigiously wealthy; she purchases domains, makes all within them lovely, and will pay them but a passing visit now and then. After stately Crécy comes the exquisite little house at Celle, comes royal Bellevue, come the Hermitages at Versailles and Fontainebleau. In these enchanted habitations she is queen; the proudest gentlemen of France adopt her colours—green for Crécy, red for Bellevue. The King arrives for supper, views the illuminated gardens, whence issue shepherds and fauns addressing him in eulogistic verses; he comes to see the acting, yawns, and often goes away without thanking his ingenious hostess. He goes away, but he comes back. His harshness, his silent moods, his weak disloyalties, his fits of remorse when death, the thought of death, gets on his nerves—not all these have availed to sever the strong chain of habit. Does he still love his mistress? She does not know. She only knows that he fears scenes, and hates intriguing women. The Maréchale de Mirepoix sees that—the Maréchale

who said to the Marquise: "It is your staircase that the King is fond of. He is accustomed to going up and down it; but if he were to find a woman he could talk to about hunting and his other interests, it would be all the same to him at the end of three days."

Mme. de Pompadour will see to it that he does not find that confidante. If he has indulged himself with a passing fancy or two, she is ready to ignore or pardon these, but friendship must not enter into such diversions. She will permit the rivals who are harmless through their nothingness. The other kind—those she will fight to the death before she suffers them.

Friendship—yes. That only she desires—the friendship born of trust and habit, slacker bond than passion, but more lasting, irking not the flesh nor weighing on male egoism and sensuality, yet containing in its slight inextricable knot all that the lovers once exchanged in thought and feeling, all that will not grow old, that will persist in malady's despite, and challenge even time's dishonouring hand.

Sublimest bond of noble natures, fairest flower of the plant that has its roots in sensual pleasure, friendship none the less can be but what the lovers are; and in the Marquise's imagination it is not invested with the purest spiritual quality. Rather is it an attachment wherein prudence and self-interest have their parts to play. But an attachment it is, and a sincere one—implying a certain devotedness in the woman, a certain fidelity in the man, which most assuredly no evil nature would conceive of, which by such would but be seen as vile complaisance and weak yielding.

To retain her possessions, titles, credit, and if possible increase them, and to retain as well the heart of Louis XV—or what serves him for a heart!—to sacrifice all else and make a merit of it, to fortify her power by such abrogations as would seem most likely to destroy it . . . this is the conception which at times will occupy the favourite's distracted mind. It is a terrible game to play; but if she does not play it, all is lost; for the King is beginning to feel his mistress's inferiority *quâ* mistress, and the

secret resistance of a body to which sensual pleasure is no pleasure, which submits and knows but scantly how to give. In his mistress's fatigued embraces, Louis XV, unsatisfied, recalls other endearments, and compares them with these. . . . And that is why, in the delightful room, she waits the hour of pleasure and is sad—sad unto death.

This secret drama, which had begun in the very ecstasy of the earliest embraces, when the bewildered King had realised that he possessed a woman chilling "as a sea-bird," was to last for five long years.

What Mme. de Pompadour lost in the shadows of the alcove she regained by daylight, thus reversing the lot of those mistresses whose every night is a conquest that their every morning sweeps away. With day, the Marquise refurbished her weapons. She summoned the make-up box and the toilet-table to the aid of her exhausted loveliness. The paint restored an appearance of good health, an artificial brilliance which well accorded with the powdered hair, the laces, the shimmering splendour

of the flowered silks, and all the richly decorated environment. She recovered her soft glance, her little subtle smile, her musical voice, her gifts of song and speech, her keen Parisian wit, a little different from that peculiar to Versailles. Thus armed, she resumed the combat. To all who vied with her for dominion she gave instant battle; and that hers might be the victory, she practised an unresting vigilance, a keen-eyed calculation, ever watchful for the favourable moment and the vulnerable point.

The King's mistress could be ignorant of politics; the King's friend could not. Thus it was hers to vie with Ministers for influence —that influence which they guard so jealously. She had won in the first encounters. Orry the Controller-General and the Marquis d'Argenson got rid of, she had replaced them by her creatures, Machault d'Arnouville and Puysieux; but Mme. de Pompadour had still to confront Richelieu, Maurepas, the Comte d'Argenson, who was lover to the false Estrades. For long, from indolence, scruple, or love of plaguing people, Louis XV had refused to give the

casting vote. He even seemed to be cruelly amused by the sport. But the murmur of the Poissonades reached his exalted ears; and—cleverly prepared by the Marquise—with that the hour struck when he must act, and act with sovereign rigour. Richelieu was the first to feel a prick. On his return from the Siege of Genoa, he had announced his intention of "abusing the Pompadour to her face like a theatre-hussy"; and almost immediately, flaunting his authority as First Gentleman of the Bedchamber, he had refused the Duc de La Vallière, Manager of the Theatre of the Little Apartments, the costumes and accessories provided by the King's Privy Purse. The Marquise's complaints were ineffective to move him. Louis XV was obliged to make a casual reference to the Bastille one evening at his *petit-coucher* before Richelieu would yield—which he did with an air of marked irony, and as if he attached no sort of importance to his defeat. Thenceforth he was more prudent, deferred to the favourite, and even served her rancorous schemes against their common foe,

Maurepas. This latter nothing would or could disarm. Backed by the royal family, and endeared to the King, he fought Mme. de Pompadour openly, with the dual consciousness of being useful to the State and gratifying a long-felt enmity. But the Marquise either foresaw or parried his blows. She contrived to be always with the King, even in working-hours, and would perpetually break the thread of too-absorbing conversations, or imperiously give orders to the Minister: "You must" or "I wish" . . . Maurepas would fume with rage and glance at Louis XV. The King, somewhat uneasily, would say: "Do as Madame desires." Then Madame would throw off a "Really, M. de Maurepas! You are making the King look yellow with fatigue. Adieu, Monsieur de Maurepas!"

The Minister would withdraw exasperated, and soothe his gall with abominable ditties. One evening at supper, Mme. de Pompadour scattered at his feet a bouquet of white hyacinths. Next day all Versailles, all Paris, were retailing a terrible quatrain:

Par vos façons nobles et franches,
Iris, vous enchantez les cœurs,
Sous vos pas, vous semez des fleurs,
Mais ce ne sont que des fleurs blanches.

The allusion to feminine infirmities keenly offended the King and the Marquise. Mme. de Pompadour insisted that the anonymous author should be discovered and chastised. She went herself, with Mme. d'Estrades, to Maurepas.

"It shall not be said that I send for the Ministers; I come to them. And when shall you know the authors of these songs?"

"When I know them, Madame, I shall inform the King."

"You make light, Monsieur, of the King's mistresses."

"I have always respected them, Madame, *no matter of what sort they were.*"

The Marquise, wounded to the quick, took leave with this shaft in her breast; and Maurepas went off to laugh over the incident with the Maréchale de Villars, a friend of the Queen's.

"You have had a charming visitor!" it was remarked.

"Yes—the Marquise. It will bring her bad luck. I remember that Mme. de Mailly also came to see me—two days before she was dismissed. As for Mme. de Châteauroux, it's well known that I had her poisoned. I bring them all bad luck."

He boasted too soon. His ruin was assured from that moment. Mme. de Pompadour affected to fear the poison which her contemporaries suspected everywhere. She refused to eat and drink, even at the King's own table; she incessantly wept and bewailed herself. All men, and kings among them, have a holy horror of feminine "scenes"; Louis XIV himself used to give in to Mme. de Montespan's displays of violence. Maurepas—on April 25, 1740[1]—was given a brutal dismissal, of which the Queen, the guileless Queen, had to bear the consequences. The disgraced Minister's exile lasted twenty-five years—but the Poissonades

[1] This date in the text must be erroneous. We have long passed 1740. [Translator's Note.]

went on, and the Chevalier de Reneguier had the temerity to publish this epigram:

> Fille d'une sangsue et sangsue elle-même,
> Poisson, d'une insolence extrême,
> Etale en ce château, sans honte et sans effroi,
> La substance du peuple et la honte du Roi.

This cost him his rank in the Regiment of French Guards, and twenty years of detention.

Meanwhile, in the streets of Paris, papers bearing this inscription were picked up: "Tear down the King, hang Pompadour, break Machault on the wheel." The popular clamour went up against the favourite and her creatures —that clamour which, sometimes unjust, is yet sincere, and which a sovereign may ignore but at his risk; the same clamour which in days to come was to go up against "the Austrian," and be no better understood by Louis XVI than it had been by Louis XV.

The Comte d'Argenson still confronted his detested Marquise; but he had felt the power of his adversary's hand, and so made terms with her. He was to be seen at Mme. de Pompadour's dinner-parties. He accompanied her

to the exhibition of pictures at the Louvre. There were all the appearances of a reconciliation, whereas d'Argenson was actually, with the complicity of his worthless mistress Mme. d'Estrades, laying plans for the dismissal of the Marquise and the favour of Mme. de Choiseul-Romanet.

In this way, year by year, Mme. de Pompadour destroyed her foes, surreptitiously, with stubborn patience and infinite cunning. She attacked them in open order, as Horatius did the Curiatii. This was the beginning of her career as a political woman who was increasingly to take part in affairs, to appoint Ministers and Generals, to uphold Belle-Isle and Soubise, receive flattering letters from the Empress Maria Theresa, and declare herself the King of Prussia's personal enemy. Strong in the possession of secret knowledge, of her intimate acquaintance with the men, the Court, the character, of Louis XV, she was to wage war against the Jesuits and the Parliament, and to inaugurate a new system of national amities and alliances.

We do not propose to follow her through these political intrigues—unredeemed, in the eyes of posterity, by two ideas which were embodied in two great achievements: the Sèvres Manufactory, and the Ecole Militaire. We shall confine ourselves to those matters which may throw light upon the woman's inward life, and make clear the evolution of her character and the manner of her relations with the King. We shall see her, in the space of two years, completely transformed; we shall see her lose, in the Versailles atmosphere, that gentle kindliness which was her native temper; and, intoxicated by vainglory, vindicate the saddened judgment of Bernis: "The Marquise had none of the great vices of ambitious women; but she had all the little pettinesses, and the levity, of those whose beauty and superior brains have filled them with an overweening vanity. She did evil without ill-intent, and good because the fancy took her; her friendship was as jealous as love, as light, as inconstant, and as precarious."

CHAPTER X

IN the December of 1749, well-informed persons were whispering of a piece of news which gave the courtiers much food for reflection. Those fine Upstairs Apartments, that abode of love wherein the Marquise had spent the happiest years of her liaison with the King, the charming scene of their little concerts, their intimate suppers . . . this was being given up by Mme. de Pompadour to the Duc and the Duchesse d'Ayen. She was to have the Penthièvres' apartments, together with those assigned to the Comtesse de Toulouse—that is to say, all the space between the vault of the Chapelle and the angle of the Palace, on the terrace looking towards the northern parterre.

What was the reason for the change? It was true that between the King's apartments and

those of the Comtesse de Toulouse, there was a secret staircase dating from the preceding century. By this staircase Louis XIV had been wont to go down to Mme. de Montespan; and Louis XV had used it to visit his eldest daughter, Madame the Infanta, when she came on a visit from Parma and occupied the uninhabited Toulouse quarters. . . . But the staircase had nothing to do with the lovers' mutual decision. Mme. de Pompadour, by thus establishing herself in full view of the entire Court and in Madame Adélaïde's immediate proximity, was sacrificing an amorous liberty which was no longer of any use to her; for henceforth, between her and the King, love was to be no more than a memory.

The Duc de Luynes, in his guarded fashion, gives an account of this event which implies all that he does not say: "Mme. de Pompadour understands the King; she is aware that he is not irreligious and that the reflections he makes and the sermons he hears can cause him remorse and uneasiness; she knows too that he genuinely cares for her, but that serious

reasons prevail over everything else, and all the more because his habits are stronger than his temperament, and if he should happen to find within the circle of his family a companionship which tended to keep him quietly and pleasantly amused, it might be that, having no violent passion to get over, he would prefer the path of duty to his present preoccupation. She has observed the King's fancy for Mesdames. . . . As it is probable that Madame Sophie and Madame Louise will be ere long leaving Fontevrault, and that this will bring about an extension of the necessary accommodation, it was easy to foresee that the King (who for about the last four months has formed a habit of bringing Mesdames quite unceremoniously to his quarters after supper, as he might after a hunting day) would very probably give these apartments to Madame and Madame Adélaïde, and make a practice of going down there and even taking supper there. And that is precisely what she wanted to prevent. . . ."

The installation took two years. All was not yet ready when, in the beautiful park at

Bellevue, the Marquise put up a graceful statue which she had ordered from Pigalle, to replace an emblematic figure of Love. The Queen, who consented to visit Bellevue, was one day to perceive the marble figure of a woman—chaste, despite an uncovered bosom and legs bare to the knees. She was to notice the dignified decency of the drapery, the simplicity of the attitude, with one arm pointing to the breast, the other making a vague gesture of welcome; she was to perceive, in the nymph's countenance, an idealised likeness of Mme. de Pompadour; and, asking the old gardener who accompanied her the name of the bosket embellished by this goddess, was to have for reply: "It used to be called the Bosket of Love. Now, Madame, it is the Bosket of Friendship." And possibly, at the bottom of her heart, Marie Leczinska may have felt the thrill of a secret retaliation, which would not be without its own anxieties. . . .

By 1751 the transformation was complete. The Marquise had succeeded in that delicate and arduous achievement, that masterpiece of

feminine skill—the being, or appearing to be, the first to give up a lover who has wearied; the keeping of his friendship while remaining, in a passionless but still most intimate relationship, his mistress in the true sense of the word.

A sacrifice, this, which cost nothing to the exhausted senses; a sacrifice which spared the favourite's pride and served her interests—but none the less, a sacrifice and a painful one. A woman never renounces without suffering that which has been her own, even though she no longer greatly values it . . . that is, unless she can immediately replace it. Only for love is love forgotten. None has ever known the inner history of the long good-bye that Mme. de Pompadour bade slowly, sadly, to the royal passion, while little by little she was detaching herself from him who was detaching himself from her. . . . She saw it plainly—Louis XV was absent-minded, impatient, taciturn; he often left without a parting kiss the frustrate bed he still would visit now and then. Soon these occasions grew yet rarer. He was breaking physically with her who could still amuse

but could no longer intoxicate him. With new eyes he looked now upon the hidden forms of other women; and between the Marquise and the King there ever stood a figure insubstantial as a cloud at dawn—the new Unknown who was to come.

What would be her name? Forcalquier, Choiseul, or Coislin?

"Madame," writes Mme. du Hausset, "went through many tribulations in the midst of all her glories. She often got anonymous letters. There were threats of assassination or poison. I never had seen her in greater distress than one evening on her return from Marly. When she came in, she angrily flung down her cloak and muff and was extremely impatient to get undressed. Then, dismissing her other women, she said to me when they were gone: 'I do not believe there is anyone so insolent as that Mme. de Coislin. To-night I was playing *brelan* at the same table. You can't imagine what I endured. People—men and women both—seemed to take it in turns to keep an eye upon us. Mme. de Coislin said two or three

times, looking at me: "*Va tout!*"—oh, in the most insulting manner. And I thought I should have fainted when she said, in a triumphant tone: "I hold *brelan de rois.*" I wish you could have seen her curtsey when we said good-night.'

"'And the King?' I asked. 'Was he very attentive to her?'

"'You good creature, what do you know of him? If he was going to put her into my apartments this very night, he would treat *her* coldly before people and *me* with the greatest friendliness. That is the way he was brought up; for in himself he is kind and open-hearted.'"

But the Marquise de Coislin missed her mark. She alarmed the King by exactions which set him thinking; and Mme. de Pompadour, some months later, was able to tell her confidante: "The proud Marquise has behaved like Mme. Deschamps, the fashionable courtesan . . . She has been *shown out.*'

Soon there was a fresh cause of anxiety. One day, at Compiègne, there was noticed a very

beautiful girl, who was later seen at the local theatre, at the King's public supper-party, and among those invited to follow the Hunt. She was known as Mlle. Dorothée. Where did she come from? No one knew precisely. It was said that she was the daughter of a water-carrier at Strasbourg and had been introduced by a Gascon called Du Barry, "the greatest rascal in France." This man—who was later to re-appear with another beautiful girl to toss into the bed of the aging King—built all his hopes on Dorothée's success. . . . But Lebel, the royal valet, who was wholly devoted to Mme. de Pompadour, persuaded Louis XV that the lovely Dorothée was unsafe, her Gascon lover being eaten up by an unpleasant disease which His Majesty could not cure as he could the scrofula.

Then came a relative of the Marquise, a very handsome, very young, and very silly person married (by Mme. de Pompadour's past efforts) to the Comte de Choiseul-Romanet; and she proceeded to storm the royal heart. The Marquise, unsuspecting, asked her to all the

parties and warmed this little viper in her breast along with one more venomous than she, Mme. d'Estrades. The husband gave no trouble; he was "the coarsest beast at Court."

Mme. d'Estrades and her lover d'Argenson favoured the Countess's "candidature." And this young lady took good care not to ask for money! She played the very game which had so well served Mme. d'Etiolles; she declared that she was incapable of dishonouring her husband; that she detested all the young men she met at Court; and that to the King alone would she ever yield. The King, touched by this fine disinterestedness, gave the lady all that she demanded—without seeming to demand it. The Choiseuls were soon acknowledged as relatives of the King, because of a very long-ago alliance with a Princess of the blood; and the beauty's husband was promised an appointment as Major-General. This affair was conducted in nocturnal assignations, in the course of which the King nearly broke a leg on a dark and tortuous staircase.

At last, Mme. de Choiseul's advisers decided that the moment for capitulation had come. Dubois, the Comte d'Argenson's secretary, told Marmontel in confidence about the crucial scene—witnessed by him, as well as by Doctor Quesnay, who was at one and the same time Mme. d'Estrades' and Mme. de Pompadour's good friend:—

"The intrigue had gone far. The issue was at hand. The assignation had been made; the young lady was on the spot; she was there at the very moment when M. d'Argenson, Mme. d'Estrades, Quesnay and myself assembled in the Ministers' study. . . . After a longish wait arrived Mme. de Choiseul, dishevelled and in the disorder which was the mark of her triumph. Mme. d'Estrades ran to meet her with open arms and asked if it had happened.

"'Yes, it has happened,' she replied. 'I am beloved; he is happy; *she* is to be dismissed; he has given me his word for that.'

"At these words there was a great shout of glee in the study. Quesnay alone seemed quite unmoved. 'Doctor,' said Argenson to him,

'nothing is changed for us, and we greatly hope you will remain with us.'

"'Monsieur le Comte,' replied Quesnay coldly, getting up, 'I have been attached to Mme. de Pompadour in her prosperity; and I propose to be the same in her disgrace.' With that, he left the room. We stood petrified, but no one felt any distrust of him. 'I know him,' said Mme. d'Estrades, 'he is not the man to betray us.'"

And, in fact, it was not through him that the secret was discovered, and the Marquise de Pompadour delivered from her rival. The author of that deliverance was the new mistress's own cousin, M. de Choiseul-Stainville, the declared enemy of Mme. de Pompadour, who cleverly seized this occasion for making it up with her. He gave her proofs of the betrayal, adding that his cousin was too giddy to be suffered to obtain a credit which, if she had it, would be wrongly used; and that he, having judged her thus, was solely concerned with her husband's happiness and the interests of the State. Some days later, Mme. de Choiseul-

Romanet was banished from Court, together with Mme. d'Estrades; and M. de Choiseul-Stainville was invited to the King's supper table.

Thus we see that on the quicksands of the Court the Marquise everywhere encountered perfidy and ingratitude. Her only real friends were the Maréchale de Mirepoix and Mme. d'Amblemont (two featherheads whom she prettily called her "kittens"), the good du Hausset and honest Doctor Quesnay. All the others looked only to their own interests, and those who most flattered her would have trampled her down to be the first to salute her successor. Where were the warm and tender affections which might have consoled her for her sorrows? She had lost her parents, whom she had fondly loved. Her brother, whose fortune she had made, who had character and intelligence, suffered from the consciousness of being secretly looked down upon, and refused the marriages his sister suggested to him. There remained the dearly loved little daughter, pretty Alexandrine, growing in grace and beauty in a convent school.

The Marquise adored this child, who was like her. A charming picture by François Guérin has preserved to us an image of the mother and daughter—the mother in a flowered gown, with a festoon of pearls in her hair, seated on a sofa piled with cushions, her back turned to a tall mirror which reflects the nape of her powdered head and her shoulders, holding in her left hand a half-open book and with her right hand caressing the fluffy silken head of a small black dog. The daughter, six or seven years old, is dressed in the long skirt and low-cut bodice which was common to the women, little girls, and dolls of the eighteenth century; she has a lace hood on her hair, a ribbon at her neck and a rose tucked in at her waist. Seated on a footstool against her mother's spreading gown, the child leans one arm on an open cage and holds her pet bird on a finger, while a second little dog, fluffy and silken as the other, but pure white, is solemnly "sitting up." The faces are a trifle mincing and affected. But the work has value. It shows us a smiling, as it were a solaced, Pom-

padour, all glad maternal pride. . . . Perhaps she was musing on Alexandrine's future—on the marriage that she meant to be such a brilliant one, and sometimes talked of to her faithful du Hausset. The husband of her dreams was the adulterine son of the King and Mme. de Vintimille, the little Comte du Luc, aged eleven, and as like Louis XV "in face, gestures, and manners" as Alexandrine was to Mme. de Pompadour.

The Marquise caused this child of a dead rival to be brought one day to Bellevue by his governess. The two lunched with the porter; and Mme. de Pompadour, strolling in the grounds, seemed to come upon them quite by accident. She admired the little boy's beauty; and took him, with Alexandrine, to a fig orchard where Louis XV was to join her. Louis XV, who did not recognise his son, was slightly embarrassed when the child was presented to him. The Marquise waxed sentimental over the two and said: "They would make a handsome couple." The King pretended not to understand. He played with the little girl and

took no notice of the boy who, devouring figs and *brioches*, betrayed his filiation in every feature and gesture. Mme. de Pompadour exclaimed: "Ah! Sire—do look!"

"What is it?" said Louis XV.

"Nothing. . . . Only one might be looking at his father."

"I was not aware," said the King, smiling, "that you knew the Comte du Luc so particularly well."

"You ought to kiss him, he is so pretty."

"Then I will begin with the young lady," said the King rather stiffly.

In the evening, Mme. du Hausset remarked that the King had not been very vigorous in his embraces.

"He is like that," replied Mme. de Pompadour. "But don't those two children look as if they were made for one another? If he were Louis XIV, he would make a Duc du Maine of the boy. I do not ask so much: an office and a Dukedom for his son is a very small matter. . . . And it is because this boy is his son that I prefer him, my good creature, to all

the other little Dukes at Court. My grandchildren would share likenesses with their grandfather and grandmother; and that blend, which I hope to see, would be the source of my happiness in days to come."

There were tears in her eyes as she said this; and, despite ambition and vanity, there was something in that moment of the old Reinette, the tender, kind little creature whom a godless education had corrupted, but not wholly perverted.

Obliged to renounce this darling project, she next thought of Richelieu's son, young Fronsac, for Alexandrine; and in that quarter too she was politely refused. The Duc de Chaulnes proved more accommodating. He consented to betroth his son, the Duc de Picquigny, to Mlle. d'Etiolles, when she should be thirteen, upon the promise of being made tutor to the Duc de Bourgogne, and the Duchess governess to the Enfants de France.

But this joy, which was to compensate Mme. de Pompadour for all her troubles, never got beyond a hope. In June, 1754, Alexandrine fell

ill—high fever, vomitings, convulsions. In one day she was dead.

The mother's despair was terrible, and long deranged her health. Some days later, in the same June of 1754, Mme. de Pompadour lost her father, François Poisson—Alexandrine's death had killed him. Abel de Vaudières de Marigny became estranged from her. And in the anguish of her heart, so sensitive to family affections, the Marquise tasted loneliness indeed. The King had been compassionate enough, but he had no liking for tears. She dried her own, controlled her nerves, received at her toilet as before and said no word of her sorrows—a sort of professional heroism which moved the pity of some, the derision of others. . . . But Reinette, all that survived of Reinette, was forever buried in Alexandrine's grave.

And the life went on—intrigues, flatteries, lies, extreme fatigue of body and soul, and henceforth no other interest but the eternal fight for domination.

Women who have loved and suffered much will often, as they begin to age, look to God for

the supreme love which shall light their darkening years. If it is not the need of love which brings them to the altar-steps again, it is a new perception of life, life seen at last with clearer eyes and souls more deeply exercised than in the eager years of youth. It is easily comprehensible that Mme. de Pompadour, after her daughter's death, should have turned to religion. Her position with the King was no longer even equivocal. All the world knew that friendship ruled in the fine room with its red lacquer cabinet, as it had in the Bosket at Bellevue; and that only as a friend did Louis XV now go down to the Marquise's apartments —and, moreover, used the official entrance, for the little staircase had been walled up. Mme. de Pompadour was regular in attendance at worship; she fasted on Fridays and was already talking about a confessor, who was to be Father de Sacy, a Jesuit. She had been seen at the Capucin convent in Paris, going, her head covered with a hood like any nun's, to the chapel where her daughter's body lay and making a long prayer beside the tomb. In

reality she had a vague desire for religion rather than religion itself; and, being no hypocrite, she acknowledged that she hoped to obtain by her prayers the true piety which still was far from her. The intention sufficed to touch the Queen's heart. She showed real kindness to the Marquise, and she may have reckoned that in trying to save her own soul, Mme. de Pompadour would help, indirectly, towards the saving of the King's. For if she felt a real desire for penitence, would she not be obliged to quit the Court, where her presence—even as a friend—perpetuated the scandal?

To quit the Court was no part of the Marquise's scheme, and she saw no reason at all why devoutness and chastened friendship should not go together. That was Louis XV's opinion also. After having in 1752 accorded to his friend the honours of a Duchess, he appointed her, in February, 1756, lady-in-waiting to the Queen. Marie Leczinska, somewhat shocked by this nomination, gave it to be understood that she could not accept the services of a lady who, being married before

the Church, did not live with her husband. The objection had weight. Mme. de Pompadour consulted Father de Sacy. He told the Marquise that he should refuse her absolution so long as she had not returned to the conjugal domicile. In this extreme perplexity M. de Machault came to the Marquise's rescue and suggested her best course. He knew that M. Le Normant d'Etiolles was leading a very festive life with an opera-dancer, Mlle. Rem, and that he had not the smallest desire to recover his faithless spouse. Let *him* do the refusing, and the game was won. The fair penitent would then no longer bear the responsibility for a scandalous situation which would have been in some sort imposed on her by the "implacable" M. Le Normant.

So Mme. de Pompadour wrote her husband a letter replete with remorse. "I acknowledge my wrong-doing. I wish to efface it. Already the head and front of my offending is a thing of the past, and all that now remains is to remove the appearance of it—which I desire ardently to do; I am resolved, by my future con-

duct, to atone for the errors of my past. Take me back; you shall find that to edify society by the united life I shall lead with you as much as I may have scandalised it by my separation from you, is the sole concern of my days."

It is hard to reconcile this manœuvre with the frankness which was one of Mme. de Pompadour's good qualities. How could she demean herself by such an ugly lie at the very time when she was making an effort to be religious? The truth is that to resume a certain sort of piety presents less difficulty than to retrieve the moral sense when one has lost it. This superficial piety may never move the depths of the soul; it may be merely an intention, an emotion, a trickery of the heart, bringing with it no true renovation of the conscience; and it will never impose upon a clear-sighted confessor.

Father de Sacy did not long lend himself with a good grace to Machault's contrivance; and doubtless he was indignant when he heard that M. de Soubise had gone to see M. Le Normant and, imparting the Marquise's plan,

make known to him that by consenting to a reconciliation he would disoblige the King. The Jesuit made it plain that he was not accustomed to lead his penitents along the primrose path. Mme. de Pompadour dismissed him and cherished against him a far from Christian rancour, which she extended to the entire Order. She went so far as to send the Pope, by a secret agent, a confidential note, which is a very curious document in feminine psychology. The history of the conversion is given in full, but all arranged, "romanticised," to safeguard the interests of Mme. de Pompadour and her vanity as a once-loved woman. She explains that the separation came about by her resolve alone, and against the King's desire, who, however, *knowing her character, felt that no return was to be hoped for.* "Resolute to retain a person so unshaken in her new-found virtue," Louis XV had consulted the "*Doctors of the Sorbonne*" and Father Pérusseau, a Jesuit, his confessor. The doctors gave "*answers which would have enabled matters to be arranged*"; but Father Pérusseau was in-

tractable. In vain did Mme. de Pompadour demonstrate to him "*that by refusing to yield to the King's wish, he would force the King into a way of life which would be unpleasing to everyone.*" This species of blackmail left the Jesuit's resolution precisely where it was. As to Father de Sacy, in spite of the letter written by his orders to M. de Normant, in spite of the husband's reply that he was quite ready to forgive his wife but not again to see her, *he* persisted in exacting the Marquise's departure. He even declared that *there had been too much ridicule of Louis XIV's confessor when the Comte de Toulouse had made his entry into the world, and that he did not intend to incur a like derision.* So much so that, after having tried to convince him "*that he would do better to attend to religion rather than to intrigue,*" Mme. de Pompadour ceased to see him.

The Pope took this moving tale for what it was worth, and approved the conduct of the two confessors, to the great astonishment and anger of Mme. de Pompadour—who sought a priest more accommodating than the pair of

Jesuits. She found him ere long; he was procured for her—by the lieutenant of police!

And so, at last, she was lady-in-waiting. The rumour ran that she was going to give up rouge —that is to say, renounce definitively all pretensions to youth and beauty; but for the moment it sufficed her to have renounced love. She appeared before the Queen, dressed in a very handsome gown and covered with jewels; and she performed her duties as if she had never done anything else.

The good Duc de Luynes persisted in believing that Divine Grace had touched, or was about to touch, the ex-mistress of the King. "She is in bad health and suffers many discomforts," he guilelessly says. "These are the means God often uses to effect conversions." And he hopes that "these happy beginnings of piety may continue with the same fervour, and make a real impression on the King's mind."

Then, sadly, he adds: "The time is not yet come. Transitory mistresses continue. I have already spoken of one named Morphise. . . ."

CHAPTER XI

ALTHOUGH he had renounced his mistress—now his friend—Louis XV had not renounced all women. Such intercourse was in him a need rather than a passion, and a habit rather than a need. He was now over forty, and the primal ardour of his senses was allayed. Already he showed something of that craving for young flesh, that appetite for unripe fruit, which succeeds to the matured man's passion for the more developed woman, and is the precursor of senile vice.

This morbid hunger for debauchery now stirring in the King must needs be fed. Mme. de Pompadour made no demur—let it be fed, so long as at the Court it did not find its food! She would not suffer titled rivals, Choiseuls or Coislins, intriguers for her place; and to distract the King's attention from these ladies and their like she tolerated "nobodies"—girls

seduced or brought by the assiduous Lebel, the King's own man. That does not mean, as her detractors have maintained, that she herself procured them for her whilom lover and that the devotee was doubled by the go-between. The legend which represents Mme. de Pompadour as the official sultana of the Parc aux Cerfs is, like all legends, a crude simplification of very complex and scarce-analysed sentiments and actions.

It seems clear that the inwardness of her complaisant attitude is revealed in the *Mémoires* of Mme. du Hausset—an artless portraitist, but a faithful one, of the mistress whom she knew so well. The passage is worth quoting in full.

"Madame sent for me one day to her study, where I found the King walking up and down and looking very serious. 'It is necessary,' she said to me, 'for you to go and stay some days at Saint-Cloud—in the Avenue there, in a house to which I shall arrange for you to be taken. You will find there a young woman about to be confined.'

"The King said nothing.

"'You will be mistress in the house and will preside, like a mythological goddess, over the delivery. You are needed there to see that everything is done in accordance with the King's wishes, and secretly. You will be present at the baptism and will give the father's and mother's names.'

"The King began to laugh and said: 'The father is a very respectable man.'

"Madame added: 'Beloved of everyone and adored by those who know him.'

"Madame then went to a cabinet and took out a little box, which she opened. From it she drew a diamond aigrette, saying to the King: 'I thought it best, of course, that it should not be too handsome.'

"'It is handsomer than it need have been.'

"And he kissed Madame, saying: 'How good you are!'

"She was moved to tears and putting her hand on the King's heart: 'That,' she said, 'is what I grudge them!'

"The King's eyes too were filled with tears

and I began to cry without knowing why. He then said to me:

"'Guimard will be with you every day to help and advise you. And, *at the great moment*, you will send him word that he may come to you at once. But we do not talk, remember, of the godparents. You will let it be known that they are about to arrive, and a moment afterwards, will pretend to have received a letter informing you that they cannot come. Then you will appear to be worried and Guimard will say: "We must only take the first we can get hold of." You will take one of the women servants and some poor man, such as a chair-porter. You will not give him more than twelve *livres*, so as not to attract attention. . . . Guimard will tell you the names of the father and mother. He will be present at the ceremony, which is to be in the evening, and will distribute the presents. It is only fair that you should have yours.'

"And he took fifty *louis* from his purse and handed them to me in that gracious manner which he could assume when he chose, and

which had not its equal in all his Kingdom. I kissed his hand tearfully.

"'You will take great care of the patient, won't you? She is a very good girl, not overburdened with brains, and I rely on you to be discreet. My Chancellor will tell you the rest,' he said, turning to Madame. And then he went away.

"'Well, what do you think of my new character?' said she.

"'It is that of a superior woman and an excellent friend,' I answered.

"'It is his heart that I grudge them,' she told me. 'And all these little uneducated girls will not deprive me of that. I should not take it so quietly if I saw some pretty woman of the Court or the town laying siege to him.'

"I asked Madame if the young person knew that the King was the father.

"'I don't think so,' she said. 'But as he appeared to be fond of her, there is some fear that people may have been only too eager to tell her. Apart from that, she—and others, as he says, with a shrug—have been told that

it is a Polish gentleman, related to the Queen, who has apartments in the Palace. *That* story was made up on account of the blue ribbon, which the King often has no time to take off, because he would have to change his coat; and also to provide a reason for his having rooms so near the King's in the Palace.'"

The scene is consummate. The characters are well within their parts, and speak by the light of nature. All three would readily concede that there was immorality in the proceeding, but none would find any indelicacy. Louis XV was persuaded that he was harming no one, since he was wont to provide handsomely for his little sultanas and, moreover, get them married; besides guaranteeing a future—if a very modest future—for his bastards. As to Mme. de Pompadour, she fanned that kind of flame and made a mock of prejudices. She had spoken truly: it was of Louis XV's heart that she was tenacious. Transient affairs were of no importance. The Marquise could be indulgent and kind without feeling that her dignity was involved. She had, on these mat-

ters, the ideas of her time, and for her a whimsy was but a whimsy.

She knew of the existence of those quarters in the attics of Versailles where the King went all unseen of men; and she was aware that in the little house called the Parc aux Cerfs, one and sometimes two young persons, looked after by the wife of a clerk in the War Office, awaited the King's good pleasure. This Parc aux Cerfs which was to be the topic of so many foolish pens, which was, in the imagination of memoir-writers and certain historians, to contain "a herd of girls"—eighteen hundred, says Soulavie, who edited those *Mémoires* which have been doubtfully attributed to Richelieu . . . this "seraglio" which, according to Lacretelle, cost the State more than a hundred millions (a hundred and fifty millions, says another), this so-called sinister mansion, surrounded by thick walls, "lugubrious as a slaughter-house," where the padded doors would smother any sound of victims' cries . . . what was it, in sober reality?

Turn down the Rue Saint-Médéric at Ver-

sailles. Look for the house which to-day is numbered 4, a pretty little place with a side wing forming a sort of summer-house. In that summer-house behold the Parc aux Cerfs, as testified by the Deed of Sale which was recovered by M. Leroi, Conservator of the Library of Versailles. Go into the garden—if you can obtain permission—ascend the six steps called "the King's Stairway," and enter the remarkably small house, hung over with ivy and virginia-creeper. The ground-floor premises consist of a large kitchen, a bathroom, a coach-house and a stable for a single horse. Climb the wooden staircase leading to the upper floor—the only floor beneath the high dormer window in the slated roof.

On the wall there still remain the rings which formed the handrail of the balusters. On the first floor the rooms are only two—a drawing-room with an alcove and an adjacent cabinet, a smaller room with a cabinet. In the drawing-room, a glass door conceals a cupboard. No costly wainscotings, no gilded mirrors. The whole room is painted in unrelieved

greyish-white. The mouldings and cornices are simple but charming, the mantelpieces, in coloured marbles, are graceful. There is no other luxury of any kind. The inmates of this dwelling cannot have supposed that the "Polish gentleman" was very wealthy.

How many pretty girls inhabited, for a few weeks or months, this house which a financier would have disdained for his Folly? None can tell; but we know that there were never more than one or two at a time, together with the housekeeper—the "mother abbess," as Mme. du Hausset says—and the servants. The first was that Murphy whom the Duc de Luynes calls *Morphise*, a ravishing young creature who had unlearned her modesty while posing for nymphs in Boucher's studio. She was fourteen or fifteen years old, with a little infantine-feminine body, lissom and well-covered, veined with blue and flushed with rose, whereon the light played opalescent, as it were in soft caresses; a babyish face, fresh as a dew-tipped flower, the laugh and accent of Paris, and that sweet wanton gaiety which is so restful to a

tired, satiated man. This little thing became a mother; and her maternity, which made her still more blooming, made the King's caprice correspondingly ardent. He brought her to Versailles, he showed her to his intimates. Soon she was no longer "little Murphy," daughter of an old-clothes woman and a cobbler, she was Mlle. O'Morphy (?) of a noble Irish family (?) The Maréchale d'Estrées flattered her, wrung confidences from her, suggested that she should get herself "declared." And little Murphy, who had not one spark of prudence or malice, presumed on her intimacy to inquire of the King one day: "*Where are you now with your precious old woman?*" The astounded King put her to the question. Like the child she was, she began to cry and told him all. The story reached Mme. de Pompadour's ears. One word from her to the King—and the Maréchale d'Estrées was banished from Court; and little Murphy married to a Major of the Beauvoisis Regiment, who received 50,000 *livres* as the price of his complaisance, together with the 200,000 *livres* of her dowry

and a superb trousseau. As for the little daughter, born of the royal passion, she was eventually put in a convent, with an annuity of 3,000 *livres*.

Other inmates, Mlles. Fouquet, Hénault, Robert, Nicquet, Tresson, succeeded little Murphy in the mysterious summer-house. Which among these young persons was the one whom Mme. du Hausset was to look after, and who was confined, not in the Parc aux Cerfs, whence she had been provisionally removed, but in another house at Saint-Cloud? The sequel of Mme. du Hausset's story tells us only that this girl was exceedingly pretty, very elegantly dressed, very light-hearted, and singularly guileless. She received the diamond aigrette with the most lively pleasure. After supper she asked Mme. du Hausset: "How is Monsieur le Comte?" (that was what she called the King). "He will be very sorry not to be able to be with me, but he has been obliged to take rather a long journey. He is a very handsome man and loves me with all his heart. He has promised me an income, but

I love him quite disinterestedly; and if he wanted me, I would be ready to follow him to his Poland."

She then spoke of her parents and of Lebel, whom she knew as Durand. "My mother," she added proudly, "was a grocer and druggist in a large way of business, and my father was no nobody. He was in the *Six-Corps*, and everyone knows how good *that* is. Twice he really thought he might be an alderman."

She said besides that her widowed mother had "been through some bankruptcies," but that Monsieur le Comte had rescued the family by giving them 1,500 *livres* a year and 6,000 *francs* in cash.

"Six days later she was confined. She was told, in accordance with my instructions, that it was a daughter, although it was really a son; and soon afterwards the orders were to tell her that her child was dead, so that no trace of its existence should be forthcoming for a certain space of time. After that it was to be restored to the mother. The King gave seven or eight thousand *livres* a year to each of his children.

They inherited from one another, as deaths occurred. By this time seven or eight had died."

Mme. du Hausset received a very large gold snuff-box, containing fifty *louis;* and the girl, whom the King had got tired of, was married in the country, with forty thousand *écus* for her dowry and some diamonds.

Not all the inmates of the Parc aux Cerfs displayed such pure credulity. One of them, with whom the "Polish Count" had had some very tender passages, evinced a peculiar despair when she heard of the attempt of Damiens. The "mother abbess," Mme. Bertrand, questioned her and made her confess the truth. Urged by curiosity, and possibly by jealousy, she had searched the King's pockets and found a couple of letters—one from the King of Spain, the other from the Abbé de Broglie; and these had told her all. The King arriving, that same day, to pay a secret visit to the other inmate, the deserted one rushed, overturning everything before her, into the room where the couple were. She flung herself at Louis XV's

feet. "Yes, you are the King!" she cried, "the King of all the Kingdom—but that would be nothing to me if you were not the King of my heart. Do not abandon me, beloved Majesty, I beg of you! I thought I should go mad when that man tried to kill you!"

"Why, you're mad this minute!" exclaimed the abbess.

The King gave the poor girl a kiss and then, not knowing what else to do with her . . . he had her taken to a mad-house, where she stayed some days. She was told that her adventure had been nothing but a dream; but she knew very well, from the testimony of her eyes and the instinct of her heart, that the King had been her lover.

The cruelty attaching to this conduct of the King was not perceived by Mme. du Hausset and still less by Mme. de Pompadour. Far from it. It is clearly to be seen—from the passages quoted—that the Marquise admired the King's "kindness," and the King that of the Marquise.

The latter's kindness was put to the proof in

1762, when the secret life of the sovereign was invaded by a young woman, more redoubtable, her single self, than all the harem of the Parc aux Cerfs. This was no "little uneducated girl," offered to Louis XV like a bouquet of roses or a basket of velvety peaches. After the pretty wanton frolics, the lascivious ingenuities and dove-like submissions with which he had been cloyed, the King suddenly became the prey of beauty in the great, the classic style of majesty of form united to force of character; of a young person well-born, well-bred, more royal in her aspect than are many queens, and beside whom he—he, the handsomest man in the Kingdom!—looked like "a schoolboy, only half a king." This animated statue—taller by a head than all the other women, and whose raven hair, when loosened, fell right to the ground—was Mlle. Anne de Coupiers de Romans, daughter of an advocate of Grenoble. She was presented to the King in the gardens at Marly. Louis XV was as much smitten with her, says Mme. du Hausset, "as he was capable of being." For this beauty, there

could be no question of the Parc aux Cerfs. She was established at Passy, in a house expressly bought for her, where her lover, ever more and more infatuated, visited her regularly. She became pregnant, and a child was born from whom she refused to be separated and whom she nursed herself. In this handsome boy—the living image of the King—baptised under the name of Louis Aimé de Bourdon, "son of Charles de Bourdon, Captain of Cavalry," Anne de Romans beheld a future Duc du Maine. She would frequently go to sit in the Tuileries or the Bois de Boulogne, taking her son with her in a basket; and before the people who would stop admiringly to gaze at both, she would open her lace fichu to suckle the King's offspring. Mme. de Pompadour, devoured by curiosity and anxiety, resolved to make the acquaintance of her rival. One day, with Mme. du Hausset, she betook herself to the Bois de Boulogne, her face concealed beneath a drooping hood, and holding a handkerchief to her lips like a person suffering from toothache.

"We walked up and down for some minutes,"

relates Mme. du Hausset, "on a path from which we could see the young lady suckling her infant. Her jet-black hair was drawn back under a comb studded with diamonds. She looked at us fixedly and Madame bowed to her. Then, nudging my elbow, she said: 'Speak to her.'

"I went forward and said: 'What a very beautiful child!'

"'Yes, she replied, 'I may admit that, though I *am* his mother.'

"Madame, who was holding my arm, began to tremble. I felt rather nervous. Mlle. de Romans asked me: 'Do you belong to this neighbourhood?'

"'Yes, Madame, I live at Auteuil with this lady, who just now is suffering from a very bad toothache.'

"'I pity her, for I know what the pain is—I have often been in torture from it.'

"I kept looking in every direction, for I was afraid that someone who knew us might come along. Then I ventured to ask her if the father was a handsome man.

"'Very handsome,' she replied, 'and if I were to tell you his name, you would agree with me.'

"'Have I the honour of knowing him, Madame?'

"'Most probably.'

"Madame de Pompadour would hear no more. She hastily took leave; and when she was in her carriage, she sighed and said: 'There's no denying that the child and mother are handsome creatures, to say nothing of the father. . . . The boy has his eyes. . . .'"

This encounter left her in profound depression. Perhaps she was remembering Alexandrine, perhaps fearing a hitherto unknown attack of paternal affection in the King. The Maréchale de Mirepoix, who had good sense and experience, reassured her by pointing out that the King cared very little for children; that he had never done anything for the Comte du Luc—never even spoken of him; and that in short, "they were not under Louis XIV . . . I do not say," continued the Maréchale, "that he loves you better than her; and if, by

a fairy's wand, she could be transported hither for supper this evening and was well versed in his tastes, there might be something for you to fear; but princes are people of habit—the King's fondness for you is the same as he feels for your room and your surroundings; you are fashioned to his ways, his interests; he is at ease with you, he is not afraid of boring you. Do you suppose he would ever have the courage to root up all this from one day to another, form another establishment, and make a public spectacle of himself by so great a change?"

The end of the adventure was terrible for Mlle. de Romans. She had beauty, youth, a brilliant maternity, the love of the King—all that was lacking to Mme. de Pompadour; but she in her turn lacked something which her rival possessed: the arts of pliancy and patience. She wearied Louis XV by her pretensions. As easily detached as conquered, he soon beheld in her no more than an imprudent, indiscreet young woman whose effronteries annoyed him. Pitilessly, he had the child removed from her care and brought up at a distance. After an

unhappy boyhood, the youth became the Abbé de Bourbon and was the protégé of Louis XVI and Mesdames.

Anne de Romans was married, almost by force, to a M. de Cavanhac; and the road was clear before Mme. de Pompadour—the road which was not now to be much longer.

CHAPTER XII

IN that subterranean warfare waged by women against other women, which designs to keep them either at a distance or reduced to a state of inferiority and dependence, Mme. de Pompadour was invariably victorious; but her victory was never decisive. For her it was a perpetual recurrence of exhausting anxieties; an obligation to foresee, divine, keep watch on all eventualities, to have her agents everywhere, her paid confederates at every turn, enveloping the King in an invisible net while leaving him the illusion of liberty. And this campaign, wherein the Marquise countenanced debauchery unflinchingly in order to keep friendship unimpaired, was but the replica of that which, as the woman of affairs, she equally maintained against the powerful enemies who, like herself, were armed incessantly at every point.

There too she was victorious. Richelieu was bridled, Choiseul defeated, Maurepas in exile; and the last, the indefatigable adversary, Argenson, had been already beaten in the person of his ugly, evil better-half—the d'Estrades woman.

But in 1757 her luck appeared to turn. A fanatic, a wretched madman, one Damiens, struck at the King with a penknife. The wound was so slight that, according to the surgeon, La Martinière, Louis XV could next day sit up in his room, and in three days work as usual at State affairs. But the scratch put the King, his family, and the whole Court in a state of anxiety and despair which to us, on study of the documents, appears quite disproportionate to the occasion, not to say somewhat absurd in its manifestations. The King, while being carried to his room, incessantly repeated: "I have been assassinated." Vainly did the surgeon reassure him. His nerves had undergone a disintegrating shock, the effects of which were long perceptible. He summoned a priest, demanded confession, Holy Unction.

His confessor, Father Desmarets, was in Paris. The Abbé Soldini, Chaplain-in-Ordinary, spent three hours behind the curtains of the royal bed. And he had to stay in the room all night, perpetually recalled by the patient; and then it all began again with the return of Father Desmarets; while the Queen bewailed herself, the Dauphine and Mesdames were choked with sobs, the Ministers and the Dauphin solemnly assembled—and, in her rooms beneath, Mme. de Pompadour, forgotten, passed from tears to swoons, and back again to tears.

Forgotten—by the King, that is to say; for Louis XV never once pronounced her name through all these hours, and all the days of his recovery. The fear of death at one stroke severed bonds which had been woven by twelve years of love and friendship. And the unhappy woman remembered Metz and the dismissal of the Châteauroux, and trembled at the thought of all the priestly heads beneath the royal tester. . . . But if the King forgot her, not so her rivals of both sexes. Through her rooms there filed an incessant string of people,

feigning to be there for business, but in reality to get a look at the menaced favourite, whom Doctor Quesnay and Mme. de Hausset were affectionately tending. A few friends, faithful in misfortune, also came—Saint Florentin, Bernis, Rouillé, Mme. de Brancas, the little Maréchale de Mirepoix. . . . But where was Machault? He was with the King. Doubtless, on his way out, he would come to say a word of solace to his benefactress? He came out, and did not visit her. He had been seen returning home, followed by a crowd of people. And Mme. de Pompadour, cut to the heart by this cowardly desertion, exclaimed through her tears: "And *that*—that is a friend!"

An hour later, Machault, stern and frigid, entered the Marquise's sitting-room. Everyone else withdrew. They were alone. Had he at last brought hope and consolation, and a friend's support? Half an hour went by. At last Mme. de Pompadour's bell was heard to ring. The Abbé de Bernis and Mme. du Hausset eagerly obeyed the summons. In the beautiful red lacquer room they were received

with sobs. Her teeth were chattering. "I am to go, my dear Abbé!"

Mme. du Hausset made her drink a little orange-flower water from a silver goblet. Somewhat calmer, she gave orders for departure; then closeted herself with Bernis and refused her door to everyone.

But no! for now came another loyal friend who would not be denied—Mme. de Mirepoix.

And she exclaimed: "What does this mean, Madame—this packing-up? Your people tell me you are leaving?"

"Alas, dear friend, it is the Master's will; so M. Machault tells me."

"And what is *his* advice?"

"To go without delay."

While they thus spoke, Mme. du Hausset was undressing her mistress, and settling her in a *chaise-longue*. The Maréchale de Mirepoix—a tiny little atom of a woman—considered the Marquise's situation, Machault's conduct, the King's physical and moral state, and summing up in one illuminating sentence all the advice for which no one had asked her:

"He wants to be master—your Keeper of the Seals," said she. "He is playing you false. Who leaves the table loses the game!"

Mme. du Hausset withdrew. An hour later, Marigny came to her room. "She is staying, but *motus!* They are to pretend she has gone, so as to keep her enemies quiet. The little Maréchale has settled it all—but the Keeper of the Seals will pay for this one day!"

Then arrived Doctor Quesnay and "with his monkey airs, recited the fable of the fox who, having to feed with other animals, persuaded one of them that his enemies were after him, so as to get his share when he fled."

Mme. de Pompadour stayed, and it was Machault who went. The King, surprised at being still alive, kept up a melancholy mood for a few days. "My body is all right," said he, but (touching his head) "*this* isn't—this will never be right again." He thought perhaps that he was marked down for the dagger of a Ravaillac; and perhaps he suffered, too, from a consciousness of the latent hostility of his subjects. The royal family, one and all, be-

lieved in his repentance and a return to virtuous ways. He returned to nothing but his habits. One fine day, he went down as of old to Mme. de Pompadour.

The next day the Marquise got into her carriage and was driven to M. d'Argenson's. She came back in a very bad humour. Leaning against the mantelpiece, her handkerchief twisted round her hands, she stood silent and reflective. The Abbé de Bernis observed: "You look like a dreaming sheep."

She trembled, threw her muff on a chair, and replied: "The sheep is dreaming of a wolf."

Just then the King came in, and was left alone with the Marquise and Bernis. Mme. du Hausset heard sobbing behind the door, and presently the Abbé asked for some of Hoffman's Drops. The lady's-maid brought the medicine —then much in vogue as a remedy for the "vapours." Louis XV himself sugared the dose, and presented it very graciously to the tearful fair. The Marquise ended by smiling and kissing the King's hands.

Next day, M. de Argenson was exiled.

"It was all his own fault," concludes Mme. du Hausset; "and it was the greatest personal victory ever achieved by Madame. Louis XV was much attached to M. d'Argenson; and the war by land and sea ought to have precluded the dismissal of these two Ministers. That was what everybody said at the time."

Bernis had openly taken Mme. de Pompadour's part during the eleven mortal days that passed without her seeing the King, while Machault, outstripping all other ingrates, abandoned her to her ill-fortune. The Abbé, in this emergency, displayed feeling and judgment. He had desired a reconciliation between the Marquise whom he loved, and Argenson whom he esteemed; but the Minister, too confident of the King's friendship, haughtily refused every arrangement. He declined to see in his enemy's advances aught "but the final efforts of a drowning person who clutches at everything within reach."

And thus, Argenson drowned himself. Bernis, appointed Minister, then Ambassador, still later Cardinal (and a very good priest he

made), was to know in his turn the bitterness of undeserved disgrace. He did not share the Marquise's political ideas, nor her enthusiasm for the Austrian Alliance, which overthrew all the traditions of the French Monarchy since the time of Richelieu. It was with no good grace that he signed the Treaty of Versailles; and after the defeat of Rosbach and the discomfiture of Soubise, he ventured to advise the King to make peace. Choiseul, who was in favour of the war, prevailed. Mme. de Pompadour sacrificed Bernis to her chimeras, and to petty motives of vanity. The King of Prussia had derided her. The King of Prussia must be conquered, to avenge her.

In 1764, the Cardinal de Bernis saw M. d'Argenson again for the last time; and found him, as he says, "with his mind full of intrigues and schemes, while the rigour of death was creeping all over his body. He died with only two desires—to live, and to be in power."

CHAPTER XIII

IN 1764, Mme. de Pompadour, whose health was rapidly declining, had an attack of inflammation of the lungs which seriously aggravated the heart-disease from which she suffered. She was at Choisy, when she became so critically ill that she was obliged to take to her bed. The King lavished affectionate attentions on her, and did not fail to keep her informed of public affairs.

She seemed to make a good recovery and was able to be moved to Versailles. The news of her illness and restoration to health was widely spread; and the poets, who had always been her friends because they ignored the threefold aspect—moral, political, and economical—of her position, celebrated her convalescence in little verses which were by way of being prophetic:

Vous êtes trop chère à la France,
Au dieu des arts et des amours,
Pour redouter du sort la fatale puissance;
Tous les dieux veillaient sur vos jours,
Tous étaient animés du zèle qui m'inspire,
En volant à votre secours
Ils ont raffermi leur empire! . . .

Thus Palissot rejoiced. And Favart sang, alluding to an eclipse:

Le soleil est malade,
Et Pompadour aussi.
Ce n'est qu'une passade,
L'un et l'autre est guéri.
Le bon Dieu qui seconde
Nos vœux et notre amour
Pour le bonheur du monde
Nous a rendu le jour,
Et Pompadour.

But Mme. de Pompadour had a terrible relapse. The King, deeply affected, was incessantly at her side, and by an instinct but ill-comprehended by his courtiers, forbade himself to express his anxiety. She, on the contrary, clearly perceiving her condition, showed a resignation which was unquestionably more stoical than Christian.

Seated in a *bergère*, with a dash of rouge on her cheeks, as though from a supreme consideration for the friends who must not be alarmed, she was courageous from her very lassitude, detached already from all things, all persons, and herself. They spoke to her of her soul. She told them to ask the King what conduct should be hers—whether she should die impenitent or penitent, as if she would not have wished either to save or lose her soul without the royal permission. Louis XV advised her to see a priest.

On the night between April 14th and 15th, she prepared herself to receive the sacraments, and even sent for her husband, who did not feel much inclined for this obituary interview. He sent word that he was ill.

The ceremony of Extreme Unction seemed very long to Mme. de Pompadour. She begged the Curé to make haste, but then apologised for her impatience.

The day dawned wan upon the verdure of the park. It was the fifteenth of April, and Palm Sunday. Slowly the life of the Palace

awoke, round the closed room where candles flickered. On the upper storey, in the great gilded room, Louis XV reposed, or feigned repose, between his curtains; and if he did not sleep, thought sorrowfully of the dying woman whom in this world he was to see no more.

She, breathless and suffocating, unable to endure the bed, sat upright in her chair; and while the morning hung a slender thread of grey between the shutters, her reflections ran alongside of the King's, evoking, it may be, the memories of past love—the blue phaeton at Sénart, the Yew Tree Ball, the Upstairs Apartments, the little theatre and Galatea's dress, painted with green and silver reeds, and seaweeds, and sea-shells. It may be, too, that she was measuring the vanity of honours bought by such complaisances, such hidden wounds.

All that had been the great concern of her existence she now looked upon with an indifference which amazed her friends; which none could know for what it was—whether the outcome of religion or philosophy, a Chris-

tian scorn for earthly pomps, or the farewell of a weary epicurean to a world whose joys and sorrows had been tasted to satiety.

It seems to me that the Marquise's faith was too uncertain thus to have upheld her courage; and I incline to think that Mme. de Pompadour regarded life after the manner of Maurice de Saxe—as a "fair dream" that was all but fled.

She had made her will in the customary manner, with pious formulas which, it appears, were the work of the notary. In the course of this last day she had it brought to her, and re-read it; then, unable any longer to hold a pen, she dictated a codicil to her steward. After this she had the usual visit from the Post Master, Janelle—he who came every day to "work" with her; that is to say, to render an account of the correspondences examined by the Black Cabinet. . . . A little later came the toilette, rapid but still circumstantial, powder on the hair and rouge on the sunken cheeks. . . . Adorned for death, the Marquise, despite her sufferings, insisted on personally handing over her keys to M. de Soubise, the executor

of her will; arranging with her man of business, Colin, all the details of her funeral, and receiving for this last of all occasions her friends Choiseul and Gontaut. These, who remained till the evening, she then gently dismissed with the words:

"*It* is drawing near; leave me to my soul, my confessor, and my women."

Profoundly moved, they left the room; and the curé of the Madeleine stayed with the dying woman, who was still able to exchange a few words with him. As he was about to retire, Mme. de Pompadour found strength to smile. "One moment, M. le Curé," she said, "and we shall go away together."

At half-past seven o'clock she "went away" alone, into the dread unknown she had not feared. She died, aged forty-one, a satisfied and not a happy woman, who had wrested from destiny all that she had desired, but had learnt how poor a thing that all could be.

On that evening, Louis XV countermanded the *grand couvert*, or public dinner.

Meanwhile the Comte Dufort de Cheverny

having gone, that same Sunday evening, to see Mme. de Praslin (who had apartments in the Palace) had surprised the Duchess in tears.

"You find me still upset," she said; "and if you had come half an hour earlier, you would have shared my emotion. Only an hour ago I heard of the death of Mme. de Pompadour. She was no particular friend of mine, but I never had anything against her. Well, I saw two men going by with a stretcher. As they came near (they passed under my windows) I could see that they were carrying a woman's body, covered only with a sheet so tightly drawn that the shape of the head, of the breasts, of the stomach and legs, could be very distinctly perceived. I sent to ask for particulars. It was the body of that poor woman, which in accordance with the strict prohibition against any corpse remaining in the Palace, was being carried to her own house."

The Marquise had requested in her will that she should be buried near her daughter Alexandrine, in the Capucin Church on the Place Vendôme. The funeral procession left

her house at Versailles at six o'clock in the evening, during a violent storm.

At six o'clock Louis XV was alone with his valet-de-chambre Champlost in his private study, which looked straight out on the Avenue. The King had the door locked; then, taking Champlost's arm, went out with him upon the balcony.

Silently he watched the procession file along, and disappear afar between the trees, in the wild falling dusk. The rain was beating on his uncovered head, and wetting his clothes, but he seemed unaware of anything but his deep sorrow.

When he could see no more but storm and night, Louis XV turned back into his study. Two large tears were still upon his cheeks, and Champlost heard him murmur: "The only tribute I have been able to render her. . . ."

CHAPTER XIV

IN the vault at the Capucines, where Mme. de Pompadour had been wont to declare she would bury herself alive if ever Louis XV deserted her, "the noble bones of the la Trémoilles were confounded" (says a cruel contemporary) "when they became aware of the neighbouring fish-bones (*arêtes des Poisson*)." A preacher, much embarrassed by his text, delivered the funeral oration. "I receive the body of the *très haute et très puissante dame*, Mme. la Marquise de Pompadour, Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen. Hers then it had been to study at the school of all the virtues, for the Queen is a pattern of kindness, piety, modesty, and forbearance. . . ." Thus, rather subtly, did the Capucin take advantage of this singular

occasion to pronounce a lengthy panegyric on Marie Leczinska.

But the Parisians, who were not to be disarmed by death, were already fabricating satirical epitaphs:

> Ci-gît qui fut vingt ans pucelle,
> Sept ans catin, et huit ans maq . . .

And this, which reproduced the abominable allusion in Maurepas' notorious quatrain:

> D. D. Joann. Poisson epitaphium,
> Hic Piscis regina jacet, quæ lilia succit
> Per nimis; an mirum si floribus occubat albis.

At Versailles, the third day after the obsequies, there was no further mention of the Marquise. The mechanism of the Court had not been interrupted in its daily functioning. The King's apparent indifference was already stirring the ambitions of fair ladies who aspired to inherit the now vacant "appointment" of favourite.

Had Louis XV so quickly forgotten? Some days before the Marquise's death, on April 9th, he wrote to his son-in-law, the Infante Don

Philip: "My anxieties are by no means abated, and to you I will confess that I have but little hope, and greatly fear that the end may be only too near. Twenty years, all but, of intimacy and loyal friendship! . . . Well, God is our Master, we must yield to His will in all things. M. de Rochechouart will have heard of his wife's death after long sufferings —how I feel for him, if he loved her!" And on April 16th: "My preceding letter will have given you an idea of why I have not answered yours until to-day. All my anxiety is over, in the saddest way of all. You will easily divine the truth. . . ." This discreet lamentation seems to reveal a hidden sensibility, a heartfelt sorrow, which few perceived beneath the King's glacial mask, and of which Champlost alone beheld the most moving expression —of Louis XV bare-headed, the tears streaming from his eyes, watching the Marquise's funeral train go from his sight.

But if he was not incapable of suffering, he *was* incapable of suffering long—and the rosy dawn of Mme. du Barry was soon to break

upon the little sombre courts and little modest entresols of Versailles.

Thenceforth Jeanne Antoinette Poisson belonged to posterity; and posterity was not to be indulgent to her. The memoir-writers of the eighteenth century revenged, in pen and ink, their many private spites; and from their judgments we must carefully disentangle any truth which there lies mingled with the gossip of the Court. Neither Maurepas nor Richelieu nor the Comte d'Argenson could possibly have painted a faithful portrait of the favourite. Love, though blindfolded, has a kind of divination. Hate is born blind. To hate is to be held from understanding. That this hate, fruitful in legends, had its very serious causes—that the Marquise often erred through vanity or ambition—that she cost the Treasury much money and disastrously influenced the royal policy . . . these are points whereon condemnatory sentence must be passed, and her enemies be granted their advantage. But it should be remembered also that the sternest

censors were not disinterested, and therefore were not likely to be equitable. And is it not farcical to behold a Richelieu posing as a moral avenger, outraged by Mlle. Poisson?

Following these, certain modern historians —and chiefest of them all our loved, our noble Michelet—have painted the Marquise's portrait in the darkest colours. They have seen in her nothing but the "courtesan" and the "blood-sucker." Between the testimony of the upright Duc de Luynes, so measured, so convincing, and the frantic accusations of a d'Argenson, Michelet does not hesitate. The absurd legends about the secret orgies of Versailles and the sadic debauches of the Parc aux Cerfs, the obscene imaginings of the gutter-balladists —he accepts and utilises these. Intelligence, beauty, kind-heartedness and even taste, even the delicate charm which accounts for her extraordinary and enduring fortune—these he denies to the Marquise.

The truth is that he sees with the eyes of the crowd, and that for this child of Rousseau, this plebeian of genius, fervent to the point of in-

justice, all that represents the old aristocratic France is evil from first to last. He no more comprehends the character of a Pompadour than the grace of a Boucher canvas. The good that she achieved—the creation of the Ecole Militaire and the Manufactory of Sèvres, the renovation of the Gobelin tapestries, the encouragement shown to artists, the constant protection given to writers, even the most free-thinking, even the authors of the Encyclopædia—all is reckoned as nothing beside the Parc aux Cerfs and the ten millions consumed at Crécy and Bellevue and the Elysée.

The Goncourts too, more sensitive to the artistic qualities of Mme. de Pompadour, have yielded to the influence of the pamphleteers. The "evil nature," the "hard heart"—they take these from the Memoirs of Argenson, who had good reasons for being malevolent. M. de Nolhac's brilliant study, *Madame de Pompadour et Louis XV*, has given us at last a truthful portrait of the Marquise; and doubtless it will do something to rectify the falsities or distortions of the conventional presentation.

Voltaire, who had shamefully eulogised, and then shamefully insulted, Mme. de Pompadour, paid her homage when she was dead; and Diderot wrote:

"What will survive of her? The Treaty of Versailles, which will last as long as such things may; the *Amour* of Bouchardon, which will be admired to all time; some graven gems which will perplex the antiquaries; a good little picture by Vanloo which will be occasionally looked at; and a pinch of ashes."

Much more than these survive—masterpieces which have enriched our museums, and which would have been more numerous if the Revolutionary stupidity had respected Bellevue, Crécy, the Hermitage—all vanished like so many other marvels of the older France. There remain the Ecole Militaire, Sèvres, a decorative style of marked originality—and a charming picture of the Parisian woman of the people, entering, for the first time in her annals, the domain of serious history and seating herself—left-handed though the seat—beside the throne. "A statuette in soft paste, among the

marbles and the bronzes," as a contemporary phrases it. Mme. de Pompadour, with her qualities and her defects, is one of the most interesting expressions of the eighteenth century. She still has her fanatical detractors, but she will always have her lovers. . . . "Her grace shall prevail."